

**PROPHETIC PREACHING THAT TRANSFORMS YOUNG  
ADULTS (25-45) FROM WORSHIPPERS TO WITNESS:  
GOING BACK TO THE HOOD**

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO  
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
DAYTON, OHIO  
December, 2012

**United Theological Seminary  
Dayton, Ohio**

**Faculty Approval Page  
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **PROPHETIC PREACHING THAT TRANSFORMS YOUNG ADULTS (25-45) FROM WORSHIPPERS TO WITNESS: GOING BACK TO THE HOOD**

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The purpose of this project was to show that prophetic preaching serves as the change agent for transformation to take place in young adults (25-45) compelling them to become passionate about witnessing, transformation, and empowerment. It was the writer's hope that by the use of qualitative research, entrance interviews, pre and post surveys, sermons, workshops and exit interviews, this project would evolve into a replicable model beginning with the young adults of Macedonia. This project would be able to measure, evaluate, and present findings through biblical liberation and Black theology to transform the mindset and emotions of young adult congregants.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The writer would first and foremost like to thank God the Father, Jesus our Savior and the Holy Spirit our guide and guard.

To his lovely bride, Patrice A. Hunter, God has brought them together and he wants her to know that she completes him. Patrice has unselfishly and sacrificially supported the writer through this process and journey.

To his daughter Jamie DeAnn who is yet too young to understand, the writer believes that as she grows and journey through life, she will benefit from what God has allowed the writer to do; the writer loves her and wants the best for her.

To his parents, Dr. Jimmy D. and Pamelia Hytche-Hunter (a doctoral candidate) who have always wanted the best out of life for him, they never allowed him to live in the suitable or in marginality.

To his sister, J’Naudia Hunter-Phillips who has now joined the doctoral journey, thank you for your love across these years that have always given the support the writer needed.

The writer will never fail to remember the many sacrifices his two grandmothers, Deloris J. Hytche and Georgia M. Hunter have made that never allowed him to forget nor underestimate the power of family.

To the late Jimmie D. Hunter, Beatrice Johnson, and Georgia Smith, the writer's grandfather, and great-grandmothers that have joined that great cloud of heavenly witnesses upon whose shoulders he stand, you will forever be in the writer's heart.

To the writer's peer associate E. Dewey Smith Jr., thank you for your wisdom and for being honest with me during the crucial times of homiletical, theoretical and practical sections of this document. The writer will forever cherish the conversations that challenged and corrected him.

To the writer's mentors; Dr. Rudolph McKissick, Jr. and Dr. Harold Carter, Jr. The writer thanks you for your patience even through his procrastination. He thanks you for not giving up on him and for seeing something in him worth stretching; even when he wanted to quit. You two are a dynamic duo!

Lastly, but certainly not the least; to Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church of Dayton, Ohio, the writer's first church; words cannot express how much you mean to him and how much he appreciates you allow him to evolve as an inexperienced pastor. God placed it on your hearts to call him to pastor you in November 2009. You have grown together over these three years and God has so much more in store for you.

## **DEDICATION**

This document is dedicated to the writer's grandfather, Dr. William P. Hytche, Sr., President Emeritus of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Princess Anne, Maryland. Papa, as the writer calls him; gave his life to the academy; as a child you challenged the writer with multiplication and English grammar. You did not accept "I can't or I don't know how." You were always there to explain and offer advice. You showed your offspring that you did not have to have a lot of money but you did need to get an education. The writer, because his parents caught the vision first is finishing his own research and about to graduate with a postgraduate degree; he thanks you; he loves you and misses you. Gone, but always in his heart.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the young adult generation seems to be more interested in increased worship and decreased witnessing. With an increase in social norms, cynicism and skepticism as well as the traditional forms of ministry, many churches operating from the perspective of worship over witness seems to be growing progressively; especially, in churches of non-mega church status.

It is the presupposition of the writer that prophetic preaching can transform and empower the young adult generation to witnesses and evangelize. The church must provide effective ministry opportunities to free young adults from stereotypes and myths that have been affixed to them, and affirm wholly, new images of self by encouraging them to take on the new role of witnessing.

Prophetic preaching is a biblically based form of proclamation in which the preacher exercises the divine authority to be a spokesperson for God invested in them. In this context, authority is akin to that which Jesus had. It caused the crowds to be amazed at His teaching for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes (Mt 7:28, 29). While power is a natural derivative of authority, exercising it out of self-will is always dangerous and oppressive. But when power comes from the divine gift of authority, it becomes liberating and redemptive.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Prophetic Preaching: An Interview with Hyveth Williams, <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2011/07/prophetic-preaching> (accessed January 2011).

Prophetic preaching speaks up for God's justice in a way that is different and relevant to the needs or plight of its hearers. Prophetic preaching critically challenges the status quo. Prophetic preachers are not preoccupied with being politically correct. Unlike so-called *patriot pastors*, prophetic preachers are willing to confront injustice in the nation as well as in their local communities with divine authority. Jesus gave it to His disciples (Lk 9:1, 2). Listeners can identify this in the delivery of messages because the messenger displays the holy boldness of a lion's heart empowered by the Holy Spirit. Williams takes his cue to preach prophetically from Ellen White who addressed the controversial issue of racism in a powerful prophetic sermon delivered on March 21, 1891, to a group of General Conference leaders.<sup>2</sup> She said:

There has been much perplexity as to how our laborers in the South shall deal with the color line. It has been a question to some how far to concede to the prevailing prejudice against the colored people. The Lord has given us light concerning all such matters. There are principles laid down in His Word that should guide us in dealing with these perplexing questions. The Lord Jesus came to our world to save men and women of all nationalities. He died just as much for the colored people as for the white race.<sup>3</sup>

According to Williams, prophetic preaching not only challenges the status quo but also offers theological and biblical insights into the current human situation from an individual's enslavement to sin to current cries for freedom echoed around the world in massive protests. It provides divinely orchestrated strategies on how to move out of despair with determination and hope.

From prophetic preaching should emerge the burning desire to grow in the love and knowledge of God found in Christ Jesus. When this occurs, a strong desire to share that love with others will captivate the heart of those being discipled. A line in a familiar

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

gospel song speaks of discipleship and evangelism clearly as it says, “I said I wasn’t going to tell nobody but I just could not keep it to myself, what the Lord had done for me.” The compelling nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot and should not be lost in the hype and frenzy of charismatic worship. However, in many traditional churches across the country, especially those who find themselves growing at unexpected rates, worship and worship alone is the hallmark for success and growth. On the other hand, congregations who cannot afford to retrofit their sanctuaries and worship styles to provide an atmosphere of contemporary and charismatic worship are facing the reality of empty pews, shallow collection plates, and the struggle to survive.

According to Christopher Lazo, “You will become like who you hang around.” Lazo says, “You will hang around people you have something deeply in common with—your social circles will revolve around the things that you adore”.<sup>4</sup> In a nutshell, you will be discipled according to what you most value. Further, you will also influence others in the same sphere of shared desires. Take bowling, for example, if your identity is shaped by your desire to become the best bowler in the world, the practice of bowling will feed your obsession; you will go bowling all the time. You will also surround yourself around a natural community that gravitates towards the same passion, and in so doing will unavoidably become like them, as they become like you. Mutual discipleship. You are what you eat, and you eat bowling.

This can get really interesting for the Christian. We immediately have an open door of evangelism with many people based on shared interests.

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<sup>4</sup>Christopher Lazo, Discipleship Through Worship, <http://christopherlazo.com/2011/07/25/missional-millennials-part-2-discipleship-through-worship/> (accessed April 2011).

- 1) What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
- 2) Who else likes to do that?
- 3) Share with them this common purpose, and build a community around it.

On the other hand, according to the Pew Research Center, by some key measures, Americans ages eighteen to twenty-nine are considerably less religious than older Americans. Fewer young adults belong to any particular faith than older people do today. They also are less likely to be affiliated than their parents' and grandparents' generations were when they were young. Fully one-in-four members of the Millennial generation—so called because they were born after 1980 and began to come of age around the year 2000—are unaffiliated with any particular faith.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Millennial's are significantly more unaffiliated than members of Generation X were at a comparable point in their life cycle (20% in the late 1990s) and twice as unaffiliated as Baby Boomers were as young adults (13% in the late 1970s). Young adults also attend religious services less often than older Americans today. And compared with their elders today, fewer young people say that religion is very important in their lives.<sup>6</sup>

The writer presupposes that effective prophetic preaching that leads to discipleship will stem the tide of young adults leaving the church and refusing to evangelize and give them a new sense of belonging and conviction about having a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Chapter one discusses the ministry focus. Here, the reader will be introduced to the rationale for this project and for establishing the basis for empowering young people

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<sup>5</sup>Why So Many Generation Y'ers Are Leaving the Church, [http://www.theroot.com/views/losing-faith \(April 2011\).](http://www.theroot.com/views/losing-faith (April 2011).)

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

to become more active in the process of making disciples of Jesus Christ in addition to attending worship for themselves. It will also identify the commonalities of the writer's spiritual journey and the life of his context as a basis of providing vital ministry.

Chapter two reviews the dynamics of prophetic preaching as the basis for soul winning and discipleship, the process of being taught how to become disciples and witnesses for Christ. In order for younger members to emerge as the spiritual and servant leaders that God calls them to be, they must be able to fully and consistently discipleship and evangelism as fueled by ongoing prophetic preaching.

Chapter three will discuss the historical, theological, and biblical foundations for this work. In this chapter, the writer will examine the critical text that support evangelism, soul-winning and prophetic preaching as a tool for witness. Also in this chapter, the writer will attempt to show the evolution of preaching and how the advent of prophetic preaching is critical to the survival of the church.

Chapter four explains the methodology and the utilization of qualitative analysis to construct the research, what groups were called into place and the methods used to conduct the study.

Chapter five shares the results of the research as a result of the ministry model employed.

Finally, chapter six reveals the conclusions and observations as a result of this study. The chapter further discusses unexpected findings and what the writer learned from the project.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY CONTEXT**

#### **Spiritual Autobiography**

A native of Austin, Texas, Jamison D. Hytche Hunter was born into a strong God-fearing, Christian family. His parents, Dr. and Mrs. Jimmie Hunter, reared him and his sister, J’Naudia, in the admonition of God’s ways. Under their parents’ Christian discipline, guidance, and teaching, Jamison was ready to receive the Lord at the tender age of four. He vividly recalls courageously standing before the congregation of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Austin and declared: “I love Jesus; I want to accept Him as my Savior and be baptized.” It was also during this time when Dr. Hunter preached his first sermon. At age four, Jamison recalls being very excited and proud of his father. Things were never the same after that. Little did he know that his father’s initial sermon was the beginning of their journey collectively, and his journey individually, along this path of pastoral ministry.

As a young lad at Mount Zion, Jamison was the drummer for the Angel Choir; though young, he could keep a beat and felt God was pleased. It was later when he realized that God was preparing him to march to the beat of a different drummer. Though no longer that young lad/drummer, his journey brought him full circle; he is now a young man of the cloth and feels blessed to have been given the opportunity to preach at Mount

Zion, the church that helped raise and prepare him in his formative years along his journey.

Life changed for the Hunter family when Dr. Hunter entered his first year of seminary. Time with his family became increasingly minimal because studying required a great deal of his time and focus. Jamison really did not understand his father's struggle as a seminary student; actually, he did not know that his father struggled for twelve years with his call to preach. He, therefore, saw firsthand that struggle would accompany him on their journey.

Dr. Hunter's studies continued for a year; during that year (1988), he made another decision that Jamison felt was a *drastic game-changer*. He declared that God was leading him to transfer to the Samuel Dewitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University (VUU) in Richmond, Virginia. This was a hard pill to swallow for the Hunter family because Dr. Hunter was the Godhead of their household; his leaving was a huge transition for them. However, Mrs. Hunter, being the godly supportive, nurturing and caring wife, did not question Dr. Hunter's decision, as she knew he loved them and was on his journey, not only for God, but to provide a better life for their family. However, in Jamison's youth and lack of understanding, he pondered his father's decision and asked himself, "What kind of God would require such a transition in our lives?" In time, Jamison would learn that when God calls His servants, He prepares them, even in ways they may not understand. He also later learned that his father's move to Richmond was a preparatory phase/step along his pastoral journey. It was upon this realization when Jamison's understanding of faith was deepened and shaped his life going forward.

In November 1988, Mrs. Hunter visited her husband in Richmond. On the first day of her visit, she was hired as a Substance Abuse Director at a state facility in Petersburg, Virginia. The employer held the job for her until the family moved to Richmond in January 1989. It was a sad time for Jamison and J’Naudia; they did not relish leaving their family members and friends, however, their parents were teaching them by their actions and decisions, that it is prudent to always follow Gods providential and divine plan.

Life in Richmond had its challenges; Jamison’s mother worked so his father could devote all of his time to studying—a decision his parents made together. His mother also took another job in West Point, Virginia, which was sixty miles one way from their home, making her daily round trip trek an arduous 120 miles. Yet, she would make time to transport everybody to his or her respective places. At the end of his day, Jamison would walk the eight-mile journey from VUU to their home in Henrico County. No matter the weather, Dr. Hunter always took Jamison and JaNadia to Burger King for an afternoon treat! Money was scarce; oftentimes, Dr. Hunter would allow his children to eat and enjoy their treat, while he would wait to eat (a sandwich or a bowl of cereal) when they got home. While en route home, Dr. Hunter would lovingly say to his children: “It will not be like this always.” His father made good on his promise.

Dr. Hunter eventually earned his Master of Divinity (1991) and Doctor of Ministry (1998) degrees from VUU. Mrs. Hunter already had her Master’s degree in Clinical Psychology with a minor in Minority Mental Health from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri (1976). What a trooper! She always made sacrifices for her family, putting her cares and needs aside so that theirs could be met. After Dr. Hunter

finished seminary school (1991), the family moved back to Texas, where Dr. Hunter became pastor of his first church, New Hope Baptist Church of Port Arthur. Jamison was thankful his father taught him and J’Naudia lessons on how to make life decisions and how to handle tough situations. These lessons proved invaluable to Jamison, but not until after he strayed from his Godly teachings and made questionable decisions.

It was during middle school when Jamison began to make decisions he knew were against the precepts of his upbringing. Yes...the preacher’s son strayed. Jamison was adventurous and because he felt deprived of material things and experiences growing up, he felt it was his time to make things happen. He, therefore, began to experience the lure and desire of women and allowed himself to gravitate towards, and become curious about, drugs. Little did anyone know that he was living a *double life*? He was able to turn on the angelic preacher’s son façade, but was really a sheep in wolves clothing once he was beyond the sight and vicinity of his parents and nurturing church members.

Though not sexually active at this point in his life, Jamison was yet a bit promiscuous and would make out with women four years his senior. Even as a middle school kid, he was always attracted to older women. It was also during this time when he fought a lot—in cross-town rivals; guys from the Eastside fought guys from the Westside. Being the pastor’s son, he garnered a lot of support from loved ones because they figured he couldn’t make friends! J’Naudia, who is three years his senior, was Ms. Popularity; everyone knew and loved J’Naudia and enjoyed being in her presence. What a treat for an out-of-control and annoying little brother! Through J’Naudia, Jamison was able to do a lot of *constructive* things that most males between the ages of thirteen-fifteen could not do.

Jamison managed to finish middle school, though promiscuous and through many scrapes and bruises. He attended Lincoln High School in Port Arthur, where he was very popular, thanks to J’Naudia! He was the reigning basketball star, and sang first tenor in an all-male quartet and concert choir, bringing home major competition awards. Still maintaining that preacher’s son façade, he attended church avidly each Sunday throughout high school, but was back on the block every Monday.

In actuality, Jamison was an undercover drug-dealer; he made money by transporting marijuana from Port Arthur to Houston. This enabled him to maintain the superficial lifestyle, image, and reputation he had created for himself. However, being raised by a mother who’s a drug and alcohol substance abuse counselor, he knew it would not be long before she would recognize the signs of her son’s drug use and other reckless indiscretions. Yet, being self-centered, he decided to get as much out of his chosen, ungodly way of life before his mother became aware. He began to hang out late, albeit underage, in trap houses, strip clubs, and casinos, to avoid going home. Strangely enough, his closest friends were student athletes, but they were not aware of the other company he was keeping.

Jamison will never forget the incident that made him first aware of God’s unconditional grace and mercy. A few days before graduation, the police with a pound of marijuana stopped him in his car! The police officer made it clear that he could get five years for this violation, but the officer knew Jamison would suffer greater punishment from the hands of his father if he pursued the charge, so he extended mercy and gave Jamison a pass. It is worth repeating that this experience was the first time Jamison felt

and understood God's unmerited favor, for which he was most thankful, yet, he still had not learned his lesson.

After graduating from high school in 2000, Jamison moved to Houston to attend mortuary school. His parents provided him with an apartment; however, leaving the nest and living on his own proved difficult for Jamison. He, nevertheless, entered an Associate Degree Program in Mortuary Science at Commonwealth Institute of Funeral Services. The first quarter went really well; he was focused on his studies and made the Dean's List, but the very next quarter, he lost sight of his purpose, began a downward spiral, and consciously decided to return to the life he knew best—the streets. He was, however, wise enough to land a great job at the largest funeral home in Houston, making \$50,000 a year. Yet, he still hit the streets fast, as if he were on a mission, connecting with shady people he did not know, hanging in the rough parts of town at night and working at the funeral home during the day.

Jamison's girlfriend at the time was thirty-seven years old; he was eighteen. After all, he was attracted to older women! He lived life completely in the fast lane; all that mattered to him was making money, acquiring material possessions and looking/dressing the part. He was so thug-minded until he even had seven of his teeth altered with gold, to include twenty-one gold diamond baguettes in each tooth. The ladies called him *smiley* at the clubs. He also started marring his body with tattoos, all to imitate the life he was trying to live.

It was during this time when Jamison felt God was calling him to a higher purpose. He questioned God's call and made all types of excuses to ignore His call. He honestly did not want to preach; "Who does?" he inwardly questioned. "Surely not me; a

young, drug-dealing thug, living the fast life on the streets of Houston." Jamison loved his life; he adjusted to living on his own, had plenty of street friends, good times were endless and he owned three eight-eleven feet yellow pythons. He also had seven pit bulls in Port Arthur with his parents. Why would he exchange such a life of comfort and bliss for a humble life of preaching?

Periodically, Jamison would drive the 1-1/2 hour trek home to Port Arthur to visit his parents and to check in on his dogs. During one particular trip home, he was inebriated and high while driving, with a pistol in his glove compartment, marijuana in his pockets and openly sipping liquor from a cup. Suddenly, lights to a police car that was trailing him started signaling and the officer decided to pull him over. As bad as the situation was, he did not panic, as he noticed the officer was an attractive lady; he was confident he could spoil an arrest with his charm. When she approached his car, she began to tell him that he was swerving while driving and asked for his license and registration. While retrieving his registration from the glove compartment, she noticed the pistol. Much to his surprise, although he was working his charm, she did not arrest him! She instead entered his car on the passenger's side and explained that she was not recording him, but pulled him over to give him her telephone number! Jamison now finds himself on the brink of dating a forty-year-old cop, of all people...twenty years his senior!

Once again, God favored Jamison; his family, unknowingly, was spared yet another humiliating and embarrassing situation that was sure to come as a result of his stupidity. However, Jamison did not realize the impact of his chosen lifestyle until he arrived as his parents' home. His father was noticeably and vividly overcome with disappointment to see Jamison's teeth altered with gold, his body disfigured with tattoos

and reeking with marijuana and alcohol. In his distress, Dr. Hunter said to his son: "I would rather the Lord take you tomorrow and I preach your funeral than for you to become killed in a drug deal gone bad or a car accident while foolishly driving under the influence." His mother, also overcome with grief and disappointment, lovingly explained to Jamison how his wayward life was literally hurting them as parents because they did not raise him to be a thug or a drug addict/dealer. As a Substance Abuse Counselor, Mrs. Hunter saw firsthand the pain drug and alcohol addiction inflicted on families; she spent years in the college system and in private practice trying to liberate alcoholics and drug addicts, but she could not fathom her own son as a patient.

It was at this point in Jamison's life when he reached an all-time low; his spirit was shaken to its core and a feeling enveloped him in a way never experienced. In that moment, he could literally hear God calling him to another place. While Jamison and his father always had a tumultuous relationship, it was in that moment when he could hear and feel the love and compassion that only a loving father can extend to his rebellious son.

Going forward, things got better for Jamison; he was privileged to work at a very reputable funeral home. He absolutely loved everything about this profession and had hopes of some day founding his own establishment. He still loved to hang out and kick it, but doing so at this time in his life did not have the same passion and zeal it once had. Where had that passion for this way of life gone? He even found himself going to church more regularly and he felt that the gist of the messages was directed towards him: *surrender*. He began to feel overwhelming pressure and guilt and decided to stop going to church because the weight of the inevitable was too much to bear at that time.

Though Jamison strayed from the godly teachings of his youth during a period in his life, he really thought he knew God. After all, his parents planted the seed of Christianity and the fear of God in him, yet he struggled with the meaning of, and paths taken along his journey. He was filled with questions, yet running from the answers. Then he recalled the story of Gideon and the fleece. Like Gideon, Jamison found himself wanting and needing a sign from God; he too, needed to know that God was with him and that he was on the right path. It was not enough that while growing up people would always tell him that he was going to be a preacher just like his father; Jamison needed his own personal and spirit signs of affirmation.

One night in 2001, Jamison purposely decided to attend a Christian musical to keep from hanging out and to put himself in the company of well-meaning people. At some point during the service, the clinician testified how God called him into His vineyard; he described how he ran from God's calling until he decided to surrender, at which time he felt the burden of denial lifted. Jamison thought to himself, "Here we go again." Little did he know that the clinician would single him out from all of the concertgoers in the sanctuary?

It was as if the clinician could feel Jamison's angst and ambivalence about a major decision he was avoid making in his life. "You, in the gray suit with the pink tie; stand up," he yelled. Jamison pondered to himself, "Why me?" Though amazed, caught off-guard and a tad bit embarrassed, Jamison obediently stood, at which time the clinician said, "God sent me here to share my testimony and the Spirit says you are where I was. You are questioning God, rebelling against God. But son, please give up and give in; God needs you working for Him in His Kingdom." All Jamison wanted to do was to make a

quick exit and call his father to get some semblance of understanding of what had just happened. When the service shifted, Jamison fled like a jackrabbit. When he called his father, he explained what happened at the concert and admitted to his father that he was been running from God's call to preach. Jamison wanted nothing more than his father to give him the answer and tell him what to do. Much to his surprise, his father's reply was: "If you can keep from it, keep from it." What a blow, from his own father—of all people! Jamison did not want to hear logic, psychology, or the like; he wanted his father to tell him to PREACH! He later came to understand that his father was teaching him that a decision to preach, the Word of God is between God and His servant to be; his father also wanted him to realize that if God *truly* called him, he would not be able to run from it, but toward His will (to preach). This was Jamison's reality that his father wanted him to see come to fruition.

The day finally came when Jamison finally surrendered to the will of God. In September 2001, at his father's first pastoral appreciation service at Toliver Chapel Missionary Baptist Church (Waco) and his father's second charge after a ten-year pastorate in Port Arthur, he bowed and surrendered. Dr. James E. King of Fredericksburg, Virginia was the preacher for this occasion. The title of his sermon, ironically, was: "A Miracle in the Multitude." Dr. King led an altar call following his sermon; filled with anguish and turmoil, Jamison released a scream of surrender unlike any emotion he had every felt or known. From that moment, his journey as a preacher became his focus and was all he wanted to do. Although he began preaching, education is a priority in his family. He, therefore, enrolled in the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), where his maternal grandfather was president for twenty-seven years.

While at UMES, Jamison joined the First Baptist Church of Salisbury, Maryland, where he served as youth pastor. He also became the campus preacher, speaking at all worship services held on campus. He began to travel to preach the gospel, just as he traveled to sell drugs. God transitioned the ills and shame of Jamison's life to spreading good will through preaching the gospel. Because Jamison was actively preaching, his father, whom Jamison lovingly regards as his pastor and hero, licensed him to preach so he could have the proper credentials to be called Minister Hunter.

It was while preaching the biggest event at UMES, when Jamison noticed a young lady who appeared very mature. Being attracted to older women, he was drawn to this woman and felt she was *the one!* After the sermon, many rushed to greet him and shake his hand, except the woman he noticed. Because Jamison had to know this woman, he began to describe her to friends and professors he thought she had known. He finally chanced upon a professor with whom this woman was very close. Much to his surprise, the professor told him that this woman was also looking for him! They finally met; it turns out, she is younger than Jamison! This is a change of pace for him, but even being younger, she proved worthy of pursuing.

After narrowly making it through UMES because of his preaching schedule, Jamison was accepted into the Master of Divinity Program at Howard University in Washington, DC. What an honor; however, he found himself questioning God's plan again, wondering how and why would God allow him to go to a school in a city where he did not know anybody and did not have any connections to any churches. Jamison was worried that he was not going to preach again; most importantly, he failed to recall what he learned in his youth when his father moved to Richmond; that God prepares His

servants to do His work, even if it requires relocation to a strange land. God began to provide opportunities for Jamison to preach the gospel. Unlike the shady and questionable days of his youth—living and providing drugs to see people get high—Jamison now lived to see people’s lives change through the preached Word of God.

During his second year at Howard, J’Naudia got married. A month after her wedding, she and her husband, Jason, announced to their family that they were expecting a child. Jamison was excited about becoming an uncle! During his third year at Howard, he proposed to the young lady from UMES, Patrice Turnbow. Shortly after the proposal, J’Naudia gave birth to an adorable baby girl, Kaitlyn. The joy of his family was literally on cloud nine. Jamison has now inherited a brother-in-law, has become an uncle to a beautiful baby girl and a soon-to-be husband.

It was during Jamison’s senior year (October 2009) at Howard and a year-and-a-half after Kaitlyn’s birth, when he and Patrice were married. During this time, his preaching schedule shifted from just preaching sermons to actually becoming a candidate for the pastoral ministry. His wife Patrice was very instrumental in encouraging and praying for Jamison as he prepared for ordination and at any moment the call to the pastorate. To this end, in August 2010, his father summoned him home to Waco for his ordination at Toliver Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. Two weeks afterwards, the newly ordained Reverend Jamison Hunter was called by the body, and chosen by God to pastor the Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church (MMBC) of Dayton, Ohio.

As pastor, Reverend Hunter hit the ground running. He and Patrice settled into their new home and city and began to serve their church. As a new and young pastor, it is imperative that he came with a vision for MMBC; the Bible speaks about the demise of

believers if there is no vision. Upon arrival at MMBC, the church had a membership of 100; under Reverend Hunter's six-month pastorate, membership tripled (300)! The churches operating account also increased from \$40,000 to \$140,000, plus other assets. The church has been updated with current state-of-the-art technology through the addition of televisions throughout the multi-purpose building, a flat screen in the sanctuary for congregational participation, new audio/visual equipment, computer upgrades and surveillance equipment. New furniture has been replaced in the vestibule area and new ministries have been formed (e.g., Marriage, Christian Education, Soul Winning Action Team (S.W.A.T.) Youth Ushers, Women's).

After six months of pastoring at MMBC, Reverend Hunter enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry Program at United Theological Seminary. He continues to watch God move, lead and direct him on his journey. Through trials and tribulations, Reverend Hunter now realizes that God has been with him all along on his never-ending journey.

### **Contextual Analysis**

Montgomery County, Ohio was formed from Hamilton County on March 24, 1803. The County was named for General Richard Montgomery, an officer in the American Revolutionary War who led the army that captured Montreal. Located in western Ohio, the County seat is Dayton. It is predominantly rural, with seventeen percent of the county's 462 square miles consisting of urban areas. With a population of 166,179 people, Dayton was the county's largest community in 2000. The county experienced a 2.6 percent decline in population between 1990 and 2000, reducing the total number of residents to 559,062. The principal reason for this decline was a desire of

some residents to escape the busyness of Dayton. The county averages 1,210 people per square mile.

Service industries such as healthcare, tourism, retail, and manufacturing businesses make up Montgomery County's largest employers today. Government employment rank fourth with the majority of government personnel employed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. In 1999, the per capita income in Montgomery County was \$28,113, with 11.1 percent of the people living in poverty.

Religion in Ohio was an early and important factor in settlement. The first Moravian mission was established in 1772. Presbyterians and Quakers were in the state at an early date, the latter having established forty-three monthly meetings and settlements between 1801 and 1883. The Presbyterians founded seventeen towns between 1784 and 1799. Baptists, Congregationalists, several reformed groups, Lutherans, Disciples of Christ, United Brethren, Methodists and Catholics arrived prior to 1850. By 1890, Methodists and Catholics denominations were the largest in the State. The Methodist circuit in Ohio was organized in 1798, with circuit riders traveling from log cabins to camp meetings across the territory. In 1831, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints migrated from New York to Kirtland in Lake County. No thorough survey exists of any of the holdings of individual churches in Ohio, although many are on microfilm through the. The Ohio Genealogical Society is presently undertaking a church records survey.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>County Church and Bible Records. *Research in State Church Records*, [http://www.Myohiogenealogy.com/oh\\_county/mty.htm#church](http://www.Myohiogenealogy.com/oh_county/mty.htm#church) (accessed 26 January 2011).

Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church (MMBC) was organized on July 5, 1928, under the pastorate of the late Reverend Forest Few. The Reverend Wagstad was the Chairman and Moderator and Mrs. Few served as the Recording Secretary. After organizing the church, Reverend Wagstad commented on how great it was to organize another Missionary Baptist Church. Ms. Few and James Bayer were named pillars of the church

MMBC was located in the *Hog Bottom* area near the present location of Dunbar High School (Richley Avenue). There are no official records or personal recollections of the exact location. The church later moved to Norwood Street, in the general area of Linden Recreational Center.

After the church was established, Reverend Few allowed the Reverend John Wright to assume leadership. During Pastor Wright's pastorate, he purchased a lot for \$100 at 262 Hanover Street. The members built their first church with their own hands and moved into it with great pride. Located in the western part of the city, this building is referred to as the 'Old Macedonia.' The area was known as Crown Point, but it is now called Jefferson Township.

In 1942, Salem Missionary Baptist Church, under the pastorate of Associate Minister, the late Reverend Moragne united with MMBC. This union lasted for less than a year. Because of the dissension, the congregation of MMBC split. Reverend Moragne took a small group with him and re-established Salem Baptist Church. Reverend Wright remained pastor of Salem until his death in 1947. Following his death, the Reverend Eddie Gray, the Associate Minister of MMBC, carried out the duties of the pulpit until his death in the late 1950's.

Three months after the death of Pastor Wright, the Reverend Ed Varner was called as pastor of Salem. He held this position for one year and five months. Reverend Varner left the church in 1949 and the membership declined.

Marcus T. Clark, a deacon of MMBC, was called to the ministry in July 1949. On March 17, 1950, Deacon Clark became the pastor of MMBC. During this time, there were only seven members, namely, M. L. Clark, Deacon Cook, Deacon J. Bryant, Deacon Masters, Fannie Hardwick, and Moragne. Between 1950 and 1961, the church grew at a rapid pace and a larger building was needed. The building at 27 North Gettysburg Avenue, MMBC's current location, was purchased in 1961 for \$80,000. In 1962, on the second Sunday in February, a motorcade of over three hundred people left 262 Hanover Street and proceeded to the new church at 27 North Gettysburg Avenue. Some people called this a move to the downtown location even though the church was not located in downtown Dayton. This was a big day in the history of MMBC. Ten years after the building was purchased, the mortgage was burned. Attached is a document written by Pastor Clark regarding his leadership in paying off the mortgage and the adjacent lots.

Church membership continued to grow at a fast pace. People were coming from near and far to see the *new* Macedonia. A highlight during this time was the Youth Church; located in the basement of the church, as many children attended it and youths as there were adults attending church in the main sanctuary. Reverend J. D. Smith and others supervised the Youth Church. The Church was equipped with its own choir, ushers, and junior deacons.

Pastor Clark was a visionary; several ministries were developed under his leadership such as the Youth Choir, Gospel Chorus, Senior Choir, Junior and Senior Usher Boards, Tape Ministry, Van Ministry and several organizations and auxiliaries. Seventeen preachers were licensed and ordained by Pastor Clark and the membership continued to grow.

Reverend Clark served as pastor of MMBC for forty-three years until his retirement on October 17, 1993. Following his retirement, he immediately joined the church. His membership was short-lived, as he passed away on January 6, 1994. The Reverend Emanuel Cowan, an Associate Minister of MMBC, assumed the pulpit duties until his death in 1996.

On the second Sunday in December 1994, the membership of MMBC called Reverend Dr. Robert E. Baines, Jr., of Syracuse, New York, to be its next pastor. Pastor Baines was an educated, experienced, and proven leader. Under his leadership, hundreds of people joined or reinstated their membership at Macedonia. Christian education and relevant ministries received continued support, resulting in the implementation of over twenty additional ministries, the purchase of Macedonia Manor, Inc. (24 apartments, 2 houses, and a commercial building), the anointing of several disciples and a multi-purpose staff. Pastor Baines remained until his resignation on May 10, 2009.

On November 22, 2009, Macedonia ended its six-month search for a pastor when the overwhelming majority called the Reverend Jamison D. Hytche Hunter as its sixth pastor. Since Reverend Hunter's arrival as pastor, Macedonia has witnessed and experienced many bountiful blessings from the spirit-filled leadership of this dynamic

man of God, namely and most noticeably, the membership has grown numerically, financially, and spiritually.

A man with a vision for Macedonia, Reverend Hunter led the congregation to support the installation of a closed-circuit television system for overflow seating, thereby readying the church for increased growth and manageability of growth through current trends in technology. Second to this great accomplishment were the refurbishing projects implemented and installed throughout the church. Driven by love for the congregation, Reverend Hunter garnered the support of the congregation to rename and refurnish the Conference Room in honor of the church's oldest tenured member (Eva Jenkins). The vestibule in the Multi-Purpose Building was also refurnished, as well as the women's restroom facility and other meeting rooms around the church.

Reverend Hunter has not only upgraded the church technologically, but has implemented several key ministries within the church such as the Marriage Ministry, Women's Ministry, Youth Ushers, S.W.A.T Ministry (Soul Winning Action Team) and Noah's Ark (a safe area where members can take their child during worship).

Under God's grace, direction, and guidance, Pastor Hunter is cultivating a church of disciples and a church attractive to any demographic. Macedonia is a church that is 'Committed to the Master, Connected through Ministry and Concerned about Man.'

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

#### **Prophetic Preaching**

According to Jude Siciliano, preaching is at the very center of the church's life. It is essential for the life and unity of the Christian community. The greatest preachers, past and present, are held in high esteem for their eloquence and ability to move their hearers to faith and action. Many churchgoers remember preaching that touched them in such a way that they can only describe it as having God as its source. Siciliano goes on to say that in the words we hear, we experience the presence of God alive and speaking to our lives. Siciliano says that there is a hope that our preaching will also be open to God's inspiration and touch people's lives in ways we know we cannot do on our own. For this to happen we need a creative gift from God—we need inspiration.<sup>1</sup>

In her book, *Voicing The Vision: Imagination and Prophetic Preaching*, Linda Clader says that without inspiration, preaching becomes merely the routine we have to do—week after week. She goes on to say that inspiration renews our own preaching spirits. She says that preaching is one way God's Word becomes present tense. For this to happen for our hearers, she says preachers need to experience the eternally new Word

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<sup>1</sup>Jude Siciliano, "Preacher's Exchange" [www.preacherexchange.com/br\\_voicingthevision.htm](http://www.preacherexchange.com/br_voicingthevision.htm) (accessed March 2011).

themselves. If preaching is a vehicle for God's breath of new life; both for us and those who will hear us, then we must incorporate ways to be open to that breathe to inspire us.<sup>2</sup>

Preaching that appeals to the masses, though it may draw crowds runs the danger of being superficial and ineffective. The Apostle Paul warned that "the time will come when [people] will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves [preachers], having itching ears."<sup>3</sup> The desire to be a popular preacher has persuaded many preachers to preach a *feel good* gospel that crowds of people enjoy. This feel good gospel never mentions the devil, never calls out sin, and never confronts nor opposes anything. In their book, *Preaching From The Prophets*, James, and Christine Ward explained the necessity for prophetic preaching today when they stated that:

The natural inclination of the Christian community, like all religious communities, is to adapt its witness of faith to its most immediate human needs. In doing this, the community always runs the risk of obscuring the wider dimensions of the gospel, particularly the wider implications of God's demand for righteousness and justice. What is needed, therefore, is preaching that recovers these wider dimensions and illuminates the ways in which the community obscures them.<sup>4</sup>

Like the prophets of old who confronted the people of God with their own sins so they would turn back to God, so must the preachers of today confront the listeners with their sins and the sins of their society in order for them to repent to God.

In her book, *Contemporary African American Preaching*, L. Susan Bond states that prophetic preaching, different than other genres, which may comfort the afflicted, is

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>2 Tm 4:3 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup>James Ward and Christine Ward, *Preaching From The Prophets* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 11.

preaching that intends to afflict the comfortable.<sup>5</sup> Prophetic preaching confronts and challenges the listeners to take action of some sort. Different than the rhetorical style of preaching that seeks to persuade and push the listeners to a point of decision; prophetic preaching seeks to apprehend the listener until actions are taken and change is made.

To understand prophetic preaching, one must observe the original prophetic preachers (i.e. the prophets and Jesus) in the Bible. The Old Testament prophets both non-literary and literary basically define the prophetic form of preaching. In 1962 A. N. Wilder was one of the first to argue that genre form and content should not be separated from each other.<sup>6</sup> In agreement with Wilder, Fred Craddock would go on to state “the separation of form and content is fatal for preaching, for it fails to recognize the theology implicit in the method of communication.”<sup>7</sup> After Craddock, several other authors would present a multitude of texts advancing the idea that literary form and function of the text should have an influence on preaching styles. The prophets’ job was to inform Israel of what the will of God was and how that will affect the poor and the powerless.

In order to better understand what prophetic preaching is, it is essential to state what it is not. Prophetic preaching is not where the preacher proclaims futuristic events devoid of God’s activity in the world. The prophets of the Bible were not fortune-tellers or foretellers of the future even though a predictive element may have existed in their writings. Timothy Sensing states “prophets were forth tellers of the message of God

<sup>5</sup>L. Susan Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>6</sup>A. N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of The Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>7</sup>Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971), 128.

and the activity of God during times of crisis that impinged upon the common understandings of what was, is, and will be.”<sup>8</sup>

Prophetic preaching is not political. Contrary to what it seems, prophetic preaching does not reside with the Democratic Party or with the Republican Party. Prophetic preaching must always stay true (loyal) to only one party and that is God, even over and against (at times) the people of God. Prophetic preaching holds no loyalty with race, gender, or nationality. This is hard to accept by so many people who have America intertwined with Christianity and, as a result, perceive any unfavorable preaching to be anti-American, thus anti-Christian. The Prophet Jeremiah was considered a traitor to Israel because he spoke of Babylonian captivity as the will of God. E. Achtemeier states that prophetic announcements by preachers cannot be bias due to nationality. For example, she states that there cannot be a double standard as seen by those whose prophetical pronouncement opposed Hitler but not the bombing of Dresden.<sup>9</sup>

However, W. L. Owensby calls preachers to be more prophetic in their preaching by taking a greater political position and opposing nationalism that either promotes or is silent about poverty, racism, inequality, and injustice. He states that, "Everyone likes a generalized abstract message that favors justice for the oppressed. But prophetic truth is seldom general. A word of hope for the poor is a word of challenge to the rich; justice for the oppressed means judgment of the oppressor."<sup>10</sup> Timothy Sensing states that even

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<sup>8</sup>Timothy R. Sensing, *A Call To Prophetic Preaching*, “Restoration Quarterly,” 41 no 3 (1999), 139-154.

<sup>9</sup>E. Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 110. William Sloane Coffin, "A Neighborhood as Wide as God's Heart," in *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture: Essays in Honor of David Buttrick*, eds. T. G. Long and E. Farley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 32-37.

<sup>10</sup>W. L. Owensby, "Jesus' Baptism, and the Call of Disciples and Prophets," in *Social Themes of the Christian Year: A Commentary on the Lectionary*, ed. D. T. Hessell (Philadelphia: Geneva, 1983), 76.

though prophetic preaching has a part of judgment within its theological message, it also possesses a strong part of grace and future hope that was always present through the pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic times.<sup>11</sup> There is always the hope that the listeners will obtain or become that which God has mandated.

Prophetic preaching shifts the listener's focus, like it did with Israel in the Old Testament and in the days of Jesus, *from* how to worship, where to pray and what was lawful to eat, *to* how to live with God, one's self and one's neighbor. Jesus, who is arguably the greatest prophetic preacher of all times, has given the greatest example of what prophetic preaching is with his sermon on the mount. It is with this sermon (or series of sermons) that Jesus addresses the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the reviled, and persecuted along with the assaulted, the sued, the subservient, and the wrongfully hated. All of these were people who were powerless within their community. Jesus purposefully addresses those who were powerless within society and even the church with a message of grace and hope and a message of judgment for their opposition. Justo and Catherine Gonzalez affirm that God continually speaks through the voice of the powerless. They go on to note that the powerful have never heard the gospel accurately. They state that today's preachers must give voice to the powerless that are absent from the pew.<sup>12</sup>

Every preacher today must have, what Walter Brueggemann calls, a "prophetic consciousness." In his book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, he states that the prophet's job

<sup>11</sup>Timothy R. Sensing, "A Call To Prophetic Preaching," *Restoration Quarterly*, 41, no. 3 (1999), 139-154.

<sup>12</sup>J. L. Gonzalez and C. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980), 31.

is to proclaim to the people “an alternative future to the one the king [or those in power] wants to project as the only thinkable one.”<sup>13</sup> It is the preacher’s responsibility to transfer this prophetic consciousness to every believer; in turn they can go back into their communities and effect change in others. Those who have been changed, as a result, of prophetic preaching, in turn, make the best agents to facilitate the change of others. In short, they become disciples.

### Worship As Evangelism

The mainline traditional churches in the world are in trouble. They are in trouble because whole generations of people are not a part of their organization, and in most of these churches, absent are the young people. The people who attend these churches certainly are not bad people; indeed, most are godly people who simply do not realize that their way of doing church is not necessarily the only way. When a whole generation of people is missing from an organization that was created to embrace all generations, then that organization is not living up to its intended potential. Gary L. McIntosh, in his book *One Church Four Generations* states, “As I have traveled, consulting with churches and leading church growth seminars during the past eighteen years, I have noticed that most churches target one generation exclusively—Builders or Boomers or Busters or Bridger’s—while often ignoring the others.”<sup>14</sup> In many mainline traditional urban churches it is the youth and young adult who have often been ignored. It is not that it was always done intentionally (sometimes it is); indeed some traditional churches have made

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<sup>13</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979).

<sup>14</sup>Gary McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages In Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002).

attempts at reaching them. However their attempts have not been sustentative because they have usually not been willing to take the real necessary steps to attract the youth and young adults.<sup>15</sup> The author believes that the main reason for the missing generation is that most of these mainline traditional churches today have policies, traditions and modes of worship that are reminiscent of the fifties and the sixties. While those older ways were and are fine for the generations that grew up with them, they are completely foreign to the new and younger generation. And people, young people, simply will not come where they do not feel comfortable.<sup>16</sup>

A number of scholars have arrived at this same conclusion about the state of mainline traditional churches. Alan Nelson and Gene Appel state in their book, *How to Change Your Church (Without Killing It)*, “We do not believe there is a need to compromise on the basic tenants of the Bible or Christianity in order to bear fruit. At the same time, we know that many traditional congregations are designed to be productive in social settings reflective of the fifties through seventies—not the twenty-first century—in America.”<sup>17</sup>

George G. Hunter III states in his book *Radical Outreach* concerning the mainline traditional church, which he calls ‘Old Eastside Church’. “Old East Side Church still ‘does church’ much like it did in the 1950s. Consequently, the church has changed so little in the last half century, a period during which the people and the culture of the ministry area have changed so much, that Old East Side can no longer draft ‘a good

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Alan Nelson and Gene Appel, *How to Change Your Church (Without Killing It)* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan Publishing, 2000).

evangelism program' on the church and expect anything to happen for more than a season. Why?"<sup>18</sup>

Rick Warren, in his monumental book *The Purpose Driven Church*, states:

Some churches, fearing worldly infection, retreat into isolation from today's culture. While most do not retreat as far back as the Amish have, many churches seem to think that the 1950s was the golden age, and they are determined to preserve that era in their church. What I admire about the Amish is at least they are honest about it. They freely admit that they have chosen to preserve the lifestyle of the 1800s. In contrast, churches that try to perpetuate the culture of the 1950s usually deny their intent or they try to prove with proof-texts that they are doing it the way it was done in New Testament times.<sup>19</sup>

This last statement by Mr. Warren emphasizes what the author meant by churches not being aware that there is a problem. Many have come to the incorrect conclusion that the old way is the only right way hence the problem is not with them but with the world. Their belief then is that churches do not need to change but the world does.<sup>20</sup> George G. Hunter III, again commenting on his fictional Old East Side Church states that the mainline traditional church is culturally irreverent. He further states that these churches only have appeal to young adults as far as providing the rites of passage—baptisms, weddings, and funerals. He calls it being, "hatched, matched, and dispatched!"<sup>21</sup>

Even larger churches, which boast of a large congregation and seems to be maintaining, if they do not have a significant population of young people, they too are in

<sup>18</sup>George G. Hunter III, *Radical Outreach* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2002).

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Hunter, *Radical Outreach*.

trouble. Why? Because the older members will eventually die and they will not be replaced. It is not enough for a church to simply maintain, because if a church is not growing and reproducing, it will eventually die out. Churches really do not plateau. Thom Rainer, in his book *Breakout Churches* states, “There is no such thing as a plateaued church. A church is either growing or declining. In my research of thousands of churches, I have never seen a church maintain identical statistics for more than two consecutive years. The phrase plateaued church is commonly used to describe churches that are marginally declining or marginally growing.”<sup>22</sup>

Nelson and Appel state, “People have to know the reasons behind changes. Continually educate and make an effort to love the people. Purposefully drop in and ask for prayer. Talk about the new families and fruit of the changes being made.”<sup>23</sup> Their mindset must be changed, as much as possible, before many of the changes are instituted. There will be conflict whenever change is instituted. That is to be expected. However when sincere older Christians are lovingly taught that their beloved traditions are not on par with the Word of God, and that those traditions may be keeping others away, there is the potential for them to be a bit more accepting of the changes when they do come.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, the vision for change, and the vision for teaching the need for change must first begin with the pastor or the church leaders. If the leaders do not have the right mindset or if they approach the challenge of change in an unproductive way, the process is doomed before it gets started. It is not wrong for the pastor to want a bigger and a better church. It is not wrong to desire to progress and improve your setting as long as it

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<sup>22</sup>Thom Rainer, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2005).

<sup>23</sup>Nelson and Appel, *How to Change Your Church*.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

is truly for the Kingdom's sake and not for selfish ambition. James Berkley, in the book *Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration* said in the article 'Ambition and Contentment', "Ambition is out of bounds when we become brighter lights than God. Holy ambition, on the other hand, is Joshua conquering the land, Nehemiah restoring his people, Paul going on to Derbe after being stoned in Lystra."<sup>25</sup>

The pastor must proceed with humility. She or he must not allow their desire to achieve goals to cause them to ignore the people that those goals will involve. When the leader has had time to build up love equity by having displayed a loving and a humble attitude, then getting the people to see the necessity of the changes will be easier. Nelson and Appel state, "When leaders are trusted, loved, and embraced for their vision and communication skills, change can happen a lot faster than when leaders are perceived as uncaring, incompetent, and untrustworthy."<sup>26</sup>

The reason young people no longer attend church as they once did is not completely the direct fault of the church. Indeed, the author feels that the present church leaders are, for the most part, just as sincere and dedicated as they have always been. Their fault is not in their sincerity and dedication; they are indirectly at fault because of their lack of adaptability. Their form of church style was very effective for the young people of the fifties and sixties however; the young people of today definitely require a different approach.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>James Berkley, *Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

<sup>26</sup>Nelson and Appel, *How to Change Your Church*.

<sup>27</sup>Rainer, *Breakout Churches*.

Here are some characteristics of today's young adults, as it relates to this project, which will aid church leaders in attracting and ministering to them. Much of the information concerning young people was taken from the book, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation* by Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, and a few other authors.

First, young people are still interested in spiritual matters. It is natural to assume that just because they are not present in a church then they have no concern about spiritual matters. However while they may have abandoned mainline churches, spiritual things are on their minds more often than one might think.<sup>28</sup> Young adulthood, for instance, is a period of great changes in their lives, as well as the taking of first jobs, becoming parents, leaving home, leaving, or entering schools, etc. Whenever there are such changes individual are more likely to look to spiritual sources for help and support. One need only look at the recent popularity of the Occult, the New Age Movement, and interest in the supernatural in general. Even the taking of illegal drugs, which unfortunately many young people engage in, can be construed as a non-productive attempt to reach out for something other than what the real world offers.<sup>29</sup> Celek and Zander write concerning young people, "They are not resistant to the concept of God, but they are resistant to the Christian church. They view the church as being separatist, segregated, institutional, irreverent, judgmental, holier-than-thou, controlling, authoritarian, and to some degree, they are right."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, *Inside The Soul Of A New Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

A way must be found to tap into their concern for God, minus the negative roadblocks in the church. The fact that they are concerned about God shows that there is hope.

Second, young people of today are the first generation to have little experience with the church. In every generation there have always been young people who did not attend church, even in the *Bible Belt* regions of the South before the mass migrations of African Americans to the North beginning in the forties. However, even though every young person did not attend church, there was always someone in the house or close by in the community who did attend church.<sup>31</sup>

The young people of past generations had some type of knowledge of the church, whether they attended or not. This present generation has whole families where nobody attends, or knows very much about the church. What they know of the church is from hearsay. Celek and Zander state, “But some of the Buster’s perceptions are second hand, they are the first generation that has had very little exposure to any kind of church.”<sup>32</sup>

This is why their first experience with the church must be with authentic and real Christianity. McIntosh states, “Depending on whom you read, the consensus is that about 85 percent of people who accept Christ as their personal Savior do so before their twentieth birthday.” He also states that, “The events that seem to have the most impact on people occur when they are between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two.” In light of

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

these facts, the church must be even more intentional with people while they are young, to reach them.<sup>33</sup>

Third, young people today are looking for relevancy and purpose; they are not moved by duty and traditionalism. Whereas an older generation Christian might attend Sunday school because *it is right for me to be there*, a newer generation Christian would only attend because *it works for me to be there*.<sup>34</sup>

In the article, “Special Report: The American Church in Crisis” by Rebecca Barnes and Lindy Lowry it states: Bob Coy, Senior Pastor and founder of Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale, points to a different crisis for established churches—one of relevancy, especially in light of today’s young people searching for real truth and reasons for actions. “The emptiness of yesterday’s liturgy has got to become relevant”, Coy says. “The next generation is screaming for a relationship with God.”<sup>35</sup>

The ideal of sacred things such as traditions, are not quite as important to young people as pragmatic and usable things. Because they have not experienced the church, they do not have the appreciation for the things of the church as older Christians do. This is not bad. The church should not be doing things in a certain way because they appreciate them or revere them; they should be doing them because they are effective,

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Rebecca Barnes, Lindy Lowry, “Special Report: The American Church in Crisis”, Outreach Magazine, May/June 2006, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/outreach/articles/americanchurchcrisis.html> (accessed June 2011).

biblical, and godly. If the church is not relevant to young people then they will not be attracted to it.<sup>36</sup>

Fourth, by far, most scholars would agree that post-modernity, which the author discussed briefly earlier, is perhaps the greatest reason for the lack of young people in today's traditional churches. All scholars do not agree as to exactly what it, post-modernity is. Some of the general tenets of it include: a rejection of the concept of absolute truth, a deep-rooted pessimism about the world and a search for truth that fits them. Celek and Zander state:

Post modernity is, in our opinion, the single most powerful force in shaping the mindset, attitudes, and values of the Buster generation. A growing number of books are being written that deal with the ins and outs of this new philosophical grid work in far greater detail than we are able to provide here. However, if we want to understand and minister to this generation, post modernity is our starting point because from now on, the way these and following generations will look at and process truth will change the way we communicate and reason with people.<sup>37</sup>

Having looked at the nature of young people today as it relates to this project, and having expounded somewhat on the expected conflict, here are some of the suggestions for change. These are basic bedrock principles that various scholars have for making the church more attractive to young people. This section is by no means exhaustive. More specific suggestions will be presented later in the paper. What is presented now is a few overall principles that the author consistently found in his review of the literature.

This section begins with a quote from Kirbyjon Caldwell, the well-known pastor at Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston, a church of more than 7,000. He states in the online article “Special Report” (cited earlier):

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<sup>36</sup>Celek and Dieter Zander, *Inside The Soul Of A New Generation*.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

Our churches don't necessarily have to adapt who we are, but what we do. We must intentionally identify, predict and meet the needs of people—or else decline. Its basic business and spiritual principle: When you don't adjust your methodology and strategy, you will lose market share—for pastors that mean members.<sup>38</sup>

The overriding principle then is that if the church wants to attract young adults in the community or another segment of the population, they must customize their worship and ministries to the needs of the community without compromising the Christian essentials. The online article, Special Report further states that, "Far too many pastors plant their church in their heads and not in their community."<sup>39</sup> So then, worship services and ministries must be created with some sensitivity not only for those who are already there but also for those who the church wants to come. Those who are not yet a part of the church are frequently called seekers. John Frame (and other scholars) in Contemporary Worship Music considers his church to be, "seeker-sensitive, but not seeker-driven."<sup>40</sup>

The next step in attracting young adults is getting the right people on board. In various churches, this is accomplished with varying degrees of difficulty but the leader should begin by seeking opportunities, wherever possible, to place people in positions who have the mindset of the pastor. Rainer states, "Our research indicates that the likely path during the transition to greatness was first getting the right people on board... The right people led in the transformation of the church from an environment of mediocrity to

<sup>38</sup>Barnes and Lowry, *Special Report: The American Church In Crisis*.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>John Frame, Contemporary Worship Music, [http://wrs.edu/Materials\\_for\\_Web\\_Site/Journals/7-2%20Aug-2000/Gsell%20-%20Frame%20review.pdf](http://wrs.edu/Materials_for_Web_Site/Journals/7-2%20Aug-2000/Gsell%20-%20Frame%20review.pdf) (accessed March 2012).

an environment of excellence.<sup>41</sup> No one person can change a local church. The pastor possibly can exert the most influence but it also takes the work of many others for the changes to catch hold. These specially selected leaders will, in effect, be the multipliers of the pastor's vision for change.

Also the leaders should look for ways that the traditionalist and the young people can interact. Mentoring ministries can be set up. Seniors can adopt a young person. There can be panel group discussion involving both groups. Young people can be encouraged to attend and support the older ministries and activities that they might not normally attend. They can be encouraged to actively support some seniors. Young people are looking for purpose in their church life; they can also adopt a senior.

Another principle that the author frequently found in his reading was the idea of blending of the worship service. Since the purpose of this project is to create a church that is attractive to the young adults without any undue friction with the traditional Christians, many scholars suggest adopting a worship style that blends elements of the traditional and the contemporary. The solution seems to be a service, which blends both of the styles. There seems to be much support for this type of worship service, here are some quotes from well-known scholars:

Barry Liesch states in *New Worship*:

At any rate, they have almost ceased conducting their conferences and workshops promoting contemporary worship. The attention today has shifted to serious study sessions sponsored by local church groups, where historic, biblical concepts are shared and demonstrated. In many places, the idea of contemporary has given way to blend.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Rainer, *Breakout Churches*.

<sup>42</sup>Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church* (Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Books, 2001).

Gary McIntosh states in One Church:

Blending of musical styles has become, according to researcher John C. LaRue Jr., the primary style of 2001. He reports that 22 percent of churches employ a contemporary style, 35 percent use a traditional style, and 43 percent practice a blended style of worship. From a technical viewpoint, blending is the combining of two or more differing philosophies of ministry. Usually the differing philosophies involved are called traditional and contemporary.<sup>43</sup>

John Frame states in Contemporary Worship Music:

As worship leader at New Life Presbyterian Church of Escondido, I use both traditional and contemporary songs. I use CWM songs mainly as calls to worship, introductions, and responses to various elements in the service ... This seems to me to produce an edifying blend of the traditional and contemporary, and it uses contemporary songs in a rather traditional way.<sup>44</sup>

Joy Engelsman states in the online article previously cited:

Remember that simply putting a variety of ages in the same room together doesn't create intergenerational worship. Inter implies integration-a mixture of ideas, talents, opinions (that's the good part!). Generational emphasizes the distinctive personalities of each group. The job of the worship planner is to balance the concept of inter with generational, mixing the groups without sacrificing their personalities and without compromising unity<sup>45</sup> (author's emphasis).

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<sup>43</sup>Gary McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages In Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002).

<sup>44</sup>John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997).

<sup>45</sup>Barnes and Lowry, *Special Report: The American Church In Crisis*.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Biblical Foundations**

##### **Continuity of the Old and New Testament Regarding Prophecy**

Prophecy and the prophets form the greatest line of continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament. This is evident from the attitude of Christ and the apostles to Old Testament prophecy, from the continuance of the phenomenon of prophecy both up to and after the ministry of Jesus, from the prophetic character of his own ministry, from the placing of the inspiration of New Testament apostles and prophets alongside that of Old Testament prophets, and from the general outpouring of the Holy Spirit—the spirit of prophecy—upon the church, leading to a continuing acceptance of prophets and prophesying in New Testament churches.<sup>1</sup>

The Old Testament prophetic line did not end with Malachi, but with John the Baptist, as our Lord expressly declares (Mt 11:13). Prophetic utterances of John's father Zechariah, and of Anna, Simeon and Mary at the beginning of Luke's Gospel all bear witness to the continuance of prophetic inspiration (Lk 1:46–55, 67–79; 2:26–38). The customary division into two Testaments unfortunately obscures this marvelous unity of

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<sup>1</sup>D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 972-73.

God's program of revelation, but the line is continuous from Moses to John—and indeed beyond him, as we shall see.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore the New Testament stands in a relation of fulfillment to the actual message of the OT prophets. Time and time again, this is the burden of the New Testament: what God said of old he has now brought to pass (Mt 1:22; 13:17; 26:56; Lk 1:70; 18:31; Acts 3:21; 10:43). They all bore witness ultimately to Christ and his saving work (Lk 24:25, 27, 44; Jn 1:45; 5:39; 11:51). He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Mt. 5:17), and indeed based his understanding of his own mission and destiny principally upon their predictions.

The importance of this feature of the New Testament in authentication of the Old Testament can scarcely be overemphasized. Though a persecuted minority (Mt 5:12; 23:29–37; Lk 6:23), the Old Testament prophets are no mere idle speculative dreamers, but the most important voice coming to us from the ancient past, confirmed as proclaimers of eternal truth by the fulfillment of their greatest words in the greatest event of all time, the person and work of Jesus Christ. He himself points us back to them and their message as a permanent revelation of God, sufficient to lead to repentance and therefore to render culpable those who fail to listen to them (Lk 16:29–31). They are authorized teachers of the Christian church, men whose words are still to be heeded as the word of God (*cf.* 2 Pt 1:19–21).<sup>3</sup>

One of the commonest assessments of the person of Jesus of Nazareth by his contemporaries in Palestine was that he was a prophet from God, or a teacher from God, or both (Mt 14:5; 21:11, 46; Lk 7:16; Jn 3:2; 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17). Their basic concept

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

of a prophet was clearly based upon the Old Testament prophetic ministry, and included declaring God's word, having supernormal knowledge, and evidencing the power of God (Jn 3:2; 4:19; Mt 26:68; Lk 7:39).<sup>4</sup>

Jesus accepted this title among others, and used it of himself (Mt 13:57; Lk 13:33), as well as accepting the title of teacher (Jn 13:13), and even of scribe by implication (Mt 13:51–52). The apostles came to realize that the ultimate fulfillment of Moses' prophecy (Dt 18:15) of the prophet like him whom God would raise up was found in Christ himself (Acts 3:22–26; 7:37). Only, in the case of Jesus we do not merely have a prophet, but the Son to whom the Spirit is not given by measure, in whose teaching ministry therefore the ministry of prophet and teacher are perfectly combined, and with whom the acme of prophetic revelation is reached (Mt 21:33–43; Lk 4:14–15; Jn 3:34). However, more than the greatest prophet, we see in Jesus the one who sent the prophets (Mt 23:34, 37), and one who not merely speaks the words of God, but is himself the Word made flesh (Jn 1:1–14; Rev 19:13).<sup>5</sup>

Christ promised his disciples that after his ascension he would send them his Holy Spirit who would empower them to bear witness to him in the world, and would bear witness with them (Lk 24:48–49; Jn 14:26; 15:26–27; Acts 1:8). That this includes prophetic inspiration is clear from Matthew 10:19–20, John 16:12–15. The apostles and those who preached the gospel at the first did so in the power of the same Holy Spirit sent from heaven who inspired the predictions of the Old Testament prophets as they looked forward to the coming sufferings and glory of Christ (1 Pt 1:10–12). Hence it is no surprise that when the Holy Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, the immediate result

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 973.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

includes manifestations in speech (Acts 2:1–12), and Peter’s explanation cites Joel 2:28–32, where a major result of the effusion of the Spirit on all flesh is that they shall prophesy, including not only prophetic words but also visions and dreams (Acts 2:18). Every Christian is potentially a prophet (thus realizing Moses’ wish expressed in Nu 11:29), for the Spirit given generally to the church for its testimony to Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy (1 Cor 14:31; Rev 19:10). Therefore, Paul tells the Corinthian Christians, ‘earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially which you may prophesy’ (1 Cor 14:1).<sup>6</sup>

When Christians initially received the power of the Holy Spirit, the commonest manifestations resulting at the time seem to have been speaking in another language (of praise and prayer) and prophesying (Acts 2:4, 17–18; 10:44–46; 19:6; 1 Cor 1:5–7). It is not clear whether those who so spoke under the inspiration of the Spirit retained this faculty in all cases, or whether it was simply an initial confirmatory evidence of their reception of the Spirit, as in the case of the seventy elders, the nearest Old Testament parallel in Numbers 11:25, where they prophesied only when the Spirit came upon them initially, ‘but they did so no more.’

Jesus predicted that people would prophesy in his name (Mt 7:22; though attention should be paid to his warning against reliance on this or any other work for one’s spiritual standing), so prophecy is repeatedly mentioned as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit with which Christ equips his members to function as his body in each place (Rom 12:4–7; 1 Cor 12:10–13; 1 Thes 5:19–20; 1 Pt 4:10–11). This gift is differentiated both from tongues and interpretation and also from teaching. It differs from the former in being Spirit-inspired speech from God to man, whereas tongues and interpretations are addressed from man to God (Acts 2:11; 10:46; 1 Cor 14:2–3); it differs from the latter (as

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

in the OT) in being an utterance (frequently in the Lord's name) immediately inspired by direct revelation from the Holy Spirit, whereas teaching is mediated through patient study and exposition of truth already revealed (Prophecy under the Spirit's inspiration will also often partly take the form, as in the OT, of a reiteration of truths already revealed in Scripture).<sup>7</sup>

The fullest guidance on the use of this gift in a church is given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14, along with instruction on the use of tongues. From this and other references the following picture emerges. The exercise of this gift is in principle open to any Christian, under the sovereign distribution of the Spirit of Christ, including distribution to women on occasion (vv. 5, 31; 11:5; 12:11; *cf.* Acts 21:9), although whether such feminine ministry was generally welcomed in the churches of the time is doubtful in view of 1 Corinthians 14:33–36. Prophetic utterances are an intelligible word of revelation from God to the hearts and minds of those present, ‘for their up-building and encouragement and consolation’ (vv. 3–5, 26, 30–31). The reaction of the unbeliever to this prophetic ministry (vv. 24–25) shows that it could proclaim the whole message, of sin and judgment, as well as of grace and salvation.<sup>8</sup>

The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets (v. 32), so that prophecy is neither to be abused by people succumbing to any supposedly uncontrollable ecstatic frenzy, nor to be exercised without the check of other members of the body, notably the elders and prophets weighing or discerning the accuracy and reliability of utterances purporting to issue from the Holy Spirit (vv. 29–33). It was doubtless just such abuses which led the apostle to write to another young church, ‘Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good' (1 Thes 5:19–21)—a similar balance to that shown by him towards tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:39–40.

Testing or weighing prophetic utterances is all the more necessary in view of the warning of the New Testament (following the OT) against false prophets and false prophecy, by which Satan seeks to lead the unwary astray (Mt 7:15; 24:11, 24; 2 Pt 2:1; 1 Jn 4:1ff.), and an example of which appears in Bar-Jesus at Paphos (Acts 13:5ff.). In the latter case occult sources are specified, although in other cases selfish human desires are blamed; but in either case the devil's anti-Christian cause is being served, as the symbolic figure of the false prophet serving the dragon in Revelation 13:11 and 19:20 makes plain. False prophets will on occasion work miracles (Mk 13:22), but as in the Old Testament (Dt 13:1–5) are not to be given undiscerning credence merely on that account.

The testing of any prophetic utterance will be in accordance with our Lord's warning, 'You will know them by their fruits' (Mt 7:20), and will include these criteria: 1) their conformity to the teachings of scripture, of Christ and of his apostles in both content and character; 2) their over-all tendency and result or fruits (*e.g.*, do they glorify Christ and edify the church, as *per* Jn 16:14 and 1 Cor 14:); 3) the consensus of the recognized prophets, and presumably elders and teachers, in that place weighing or discerning what is said (1 Cor 14:29, 32); 4) the consistency of this utterance with other prophetic utterances in the body of Christ in that place (vv. 30–31); and 5) the reverent confession of Jesus as the incarnate Lord by the Spirit speaking through the prophet (1 Cor 12:2–3; 1 Jn 4:1–3). In common with other spiritual gifts, Paul stresses that this gift is unprofitable and jarring in its exercise unless it proceeds from a loving heart and is ministered in a loving way in the church (1 Cor 12:31–13:3).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

Besides the possibility of any believer exercising this gift on occasions, there were also in the New Testament church those particularly recognized and set apart as prophets for a more regular ministry of this nature. They are mentioned next after apostles in 1 Corinthians 12:28–29 and Ephesians 4:11; and they appear alongside teachers there and in the church at Syrian Antioch (Acts 13:1). Probably the best known in Acts is Agabus (11:28; 21:10–11), but others are also named (15:32), and the whole of the book of Revelation is an extended prophecy revealed to John (1:3; 10:11; 22:7, 10, 18–19). The ministry of prophets appears to have operated along with that of elders when Timothy was set apart for his ministry as an evangelist (1 Tm 1:18; 4:14).<sup>10</sup>

All the evidence from the examples of prophetic ministry in the New Testament shows that it was entirely of a piece with Old Testament prophecy in its character and form. The ministries of John the Baptist, Agabus and the John who wrote the Apocalypse alike comprise the classic unity of prediction and proclamation, of foretelling and forth-telling, and the same is true of Zechariah, Simeon and others. Similarly they combined prediction of wrath to come or trouble in store and of coming grace (Lk 3:7, 16ff.; Jn 1:29ff.; Acts 11:28; Rev 19–21). Equally we find prophecy and revelation by vision and occasionally by dream, as well as by the word of the Lord (Lk 3:2; Rev 1:10, 12; Acts 10:9–16; Mt 1:20). The use of parable and symbol are well attested, including the acted oracle (Acts 21:11). It should be noted that in the last-named instance Agabus' word was accepted by Paul as descriptively accurate, but not personally directive (vv. 12–14), although it agreed with the words he had received in other cities (Acts 20:23). However,

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 973-74.

both here and in 1 Timothy 4:14 and Acts 13:9, we see the power of the prophetic word still fully able to reflect and convey that of which it speaks (Rev 11:6).<sup>11</sup>

It has often been assumed or argued that there can be no prophecy or prophets in the New Testament sense of the word in the church today, or in any other post-apostolic age, and many of those who use the term prophecy to describe any current ministry have often diluted its meaning as equivalent to relevant preaching. But while evangelistic proclamation or a teaching ministry may on occasion approximate to prophecy, they are not the same. The biblical arguments for denying the possibility of prophets today (as summarized by J. R. W. Stott, in *Baptism and Fullness*, 1975, 100–102) are twofold: first, besides being mentioned immediately after apostles in Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, the two are bracketed together as constituting the foundation of the New Testament church in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5; and secondly, the formation of a completed or closed canon of the New Testament precludes the possibility of any fresh revelation of divine truth (Heb 2).

Others have sometimes sought to identify this completion of the New Testament canon with the time when prophecy will pass away according to 1 Corinthians 13:8; but this does violence to the context, which clearly shows that these gifts will pass away when the perfect comes, which is defined as when we see face to face (*i.e.* beyond this life and age altogether). Nor will the Ephesians texts bear the weight thus placed on them, since the association of prophets with the founding of the church does not automatically rule out their ministry in its continuance. (There are other reasons for asserting the uniqueness of the original apostolate, which do not apply equally to prophets.) Some would maintain that the prophets referred to are Old Testament prophets, but this is very

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 974.

doubtful. The argument appears to rest in fact upon an equation of prophecy with fresh revelation, that is, some material addition to God's saving revelation of himself to mankind as a whole in Christ. But there does not seem to be any solid ground for making such an inevitable equation in either the Old Testament or New Testament. All may agree that there is no new revelation to be expected concerning God in Christ, the way of salvation, and the principles of the Christian life. But there appears to be no good reason why the living God, who both speaks and acts (in contrast to the dead idols), cannot use the gift of prophecy to give particular local guidance to a church, nation or individual, or to warn or encourage by way of prediction as well as by reminders, in full accord with the written word of scripture, by which all such utterances must be tested. Certainly the New Testament does not see it as the job of the prophet to be a doctrinal innovator, but to deliver the word the Spirit gives him in line with the truth once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), to challenge and encourage our faith.<sup>12</sup>

Always in the New Testament the prophets of both Testaments are regarded as the pioneers of faith, who stand in the front line in every age and reap the full blast of the wind of persecution stirred up in the world by the devil against the people of God, whether through Jewish or Gentile opposition (Mt 23:37; Lk 11:47–50; Acts 7:52; 1 Thes 2:15; Rev 11:3–8; 16:6; 18:20, 24). Sometimes they are bracketed with our Lord, sometimes with the apostles and sometimes with the saints, but the treatment they receive as God's spokesmen is typical of what all his servants and children who are faithful in their testimony may expect in a fallen world, together with their victory, resurrection and inheritance beyond it by God's grace (Mt 5:10–12; Heb 11:39–12:2). For the testimony

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, and all his people are called to bear that testimony faithfully in various ways by the power of the same Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

### Who Were The Prophets

According to Michael Duduit, editor of *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, God was about to do a new thing in Israel, which compelled the Old Testament prophets into action regarding the prophetic utterances of a preferred future. In order to understand the new thing that God was about to do, one must be able to comprehend the contextual realities of prophecy during that time. Duduit says, “The Old Testament prophets were not simply futurologists or crystal ball gazers, and they were not interested in the future as a matter of general concern. Rather, they focused upon the character and activity of God. Their task was to preach more than predict the future and to give voice to the working and will of God among the people—past, present, and future. Indeed, the prophets looked backward to Israel’s past as often as they leaned forward toward its future. The message of the prophets activated the memory of the religious tradition, of what God had done before, as much as it anticipated what God was yet to do.”<sup>14</sup>

Although many churchgoers understood the contextual complexities of Old Testament prophesy, many misunderstandings continued to emerge. While those who were educated realized the nature of prophets and prophecy, they misunderstood the difference between prophets as forthtellers, and foretellers.<sup>15</sup> Bible students understood that prophets spoke a word concerning the actions of God in the future and how God

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Michael Duduit, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 306-08.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

acted in the past; however, they were mistaken when it came to the role of prophet, their personalities, and how they interacted within the social context of the people.

Duduit writes, “Within the church, the prophets are often seen as lonely eccentrics, powerful visionary personalities, and zealous social agitators. Like the counter-cultural revolutionaries of the late 1960s, the prophets are thought of as those who roam the countryside issuing rolling thunder pronouncements against the status quo, kicking down the walls of institutions; the prophets are viewed as righteously indignant reformers, persistently scolding the people for their failure to address this or that social ill.”<sup>16</sup>

There is a strong possibility that the image of the prophet came from the scriptures. Duduit says their pronouncements often connected to issues of social justice, and their prophetic messages did include calls for radical, even unstabilizing, social change.<sup>17</sup> However according to updated research, it is revealed that the prophets while proclaiming the word of God also lived as a normal part of the society of their day. “Many of them held other positions in society: serving in the Temple, in the royal court, as priests, or in such secular occupations as shepherding and agriculture.”<sup>18</sup>

It is also important to note that while the prophets spoke the word of God, the community at large also supported the words they spoke. The king or government sanctioned or censored the prophets when their words threatened the normative life of the community. Prophets were a part of the theological academy who lived and observed the

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

customs and laws of their community; those persons who had the expertise to interpret the Bible and what God deemed necessary for a life of righteousness.

Von Rad has aptly pictured the prophets as forging their message from the interplay of three factors: the ancient covenant tradition of Israel's election, God's new word for Israel today, and the concrete realities of some particular social situation.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the best way to grasp the role of Old Testament prophecy is to begin with the third of von Rad's factors: the particular situation. Prophets were channels through which God's message was spoken to people in a specific set of circumstances. Indeed, the more urgent the situation, the more likely the appearance of the prophet. Prophecy, therefore, was never abstract. Prophets did not spin timeless truths. The prophetic message was a divine word delivered on target.

Beyond the observation that all of the prophets spoke a fresh word concerning Israel's covenant relationship to God and spoke this word into a concrete situation, little can be said of the prophets in general. From this common root there grew a fascinating display of variety in prophetic message and style. The prophets pressed their language imaginatively to the task, employing every possible rhetorical strategy, even radical forms of expression and caricature.

In many ways, the prophets were like current day preachers who spoke God's Word concerning specific situations, places and people as they sought to bring life to the text for today's times. Therefore, when the current day preacher preaches on the prophets, they are not just preaching a sermon; they are to provide meaning to the message for today on relative issues like social justice, oppression and issues of race relations. The

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

sermon should not only speak truth to power to correct unbecoming behavior, they are to also preach a word of comfort that provides comfort the people in times of need.<sup>20</sup>

### Prophetic Ministry And Preaching

When preaching on the prophets, the preacher is actually continuing the ministry of the prophets by using the literature of yesterday to inform Christian life on today. According to Walter Brueggemann, the preacher of today is to avoid the trap of his vocation becoming domesticated. “The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”<sup>21</sup> In this wise, the prophet is to shape their ministry based on the call of God, knowing that their ministry will be counter-cultural to the world at large. Because God is concerned about the welfare of His people, He will not leave humanity to its own devices, rather, God constantly provides instruction, rebuke, and direction through the voice and preaching of the current day preacher or prophet.<sup>22</sup>

Brueggemann says the function of the prophet entails two functions, liberal, which takes the form of criticizing, and conservative, which energizes and motivates. Criticizing, the liberal tendency, involves pointing out where the present order is unfaithful to the covenant and call of God and, therefore, worthy of rejection. Energizing, the conservative tendency, calls to remembrance the relationship between God and the people and discloses God’s promise of another way of living and serving, fervently

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 308-16.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

anticipating what God will do to bring in this newness.<sup>23</sup> Prophetic ministry “does not consist of spectacular acts of social crusading or of abrasive measures of indignation. Rather, prophetic ministry consists of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people see their own history in the light of God’s freedom and his will for justice.”<sup>24</sup>

What this means for preachers is that preaching from the prophetic literature involves the preacher in two broad tasks: 1) viewing life through the lens of God’s covenant and imaginatively proclaiming the vision of human society, both in personal and social dimensions, living in responsiveness and obedience to God; and 2) truthfully and courageously naming the discrepancies between this vision and the way people are presently living.<sup>25</sup>

### Imaginative Prophetic Speech for Preaching

When the prophets spoke, they did so using the Word of God concerning specific social situations. They used a variety of methods such as poetry and prose, subtle humor, and outrageous puns, startling images and scalding satire—these and many other styles of discourse were in the prophetic repertoire.<sup>26</sup>

Today, as preachers prepare to preach, they must articulate the character of the prophet while capturing the rhetorical style of the text at hand. This according to Westermann and other theologians is identified as the “the basic forms of prophetic speech”—the characteristic oral and literary patterns into which the prophets’ messages

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

can be sorted.<sup>27</sup> Just as the prophets used these forms interchangeably, so should the preacher of today when seeking to preach prophetically from the prophets.

Building upon the work of earlier scholars, Westermann named three major kinds of materials in the prophetic literature: 1) accounts, 2) prophetic speeches, and 3) prayers. Accounts consist of the narrative sections of the books that provide details of the prophet's life, circumstances of his activity, and so on. The prophetic speeches, comprising most of the material in the prophetic books, are the messages received from God and delivered by the prophet. The prayers are, in contrast to the speeches, words from humanity to God, and, like the psalms, they consist of both lament and praise.<sup>28</sup>

### **Accounts**

Westermann calls *accounts* the narrative glue that holds together the prophetic books. The accounts relate how the prophet was called, the circumstances of particular prophetic speeches, and the reactions of the prophet's hearers to his message. Some prophetic books, like Nahum, contain no such material, while others, like Jonah, contain almost nothing else. When preaching these texts, one should consider the characters, tension, conflict, the motivation of the narrative, and how resolution is achieved.<sup>29</sup>

Amos 7:10–14. Provides an example of an account. In this text Amaziah, the priest of the shrine at Bethel, opposed the prophetic ministry of Amos in two ways: Amaziah sent a negative report regarding Amos to King Jeroboam. Amaziah also confronted Amos directly, ordering him to prophesy in his home territory, Judah, and not

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

at Bethel, the sanctuary of the king. Amaziah's actions set up two tensions that guide the narrative. First, he raised the issue of authority. Amaziah's thought King Jeroboam was in charge. The king, according to the customs of his day is the authority; power is given to others is derived from royal power. So Amaziah did what functionaries of the royal court usually do: he covered his flanks by tattling to the king (7:10–11), and he wrapped himself in the flag and attempted to pull rank (7:12–13).<sup>30</sup>

The second issue raised by Amaziah is one of vocation. Amaziah was a workingman, a priest who served at Bethel. He assumed that Amos was a working man, too—a full-time prophet. The problem, then, was that Bethel was not big enough for both of them. “I’ve got a job; you’ve got a job,” claimed Amaziah. “Why don’t you do yours elsewhere, in Judah? Earn your bread on a different payroll. Bethel is the king’s chapel, and there are no openings for prophets” (10:12–13).<sup>31</sup>

Amos’ reply to Amaziah, though brief, quickly redefined both the issue of authority and that of vocation. In terms of authority, Amaziah appealed to the king; Amos appealed to Yahweh. Amaziah had put on his most resonant voice and attempted from a human base to do that which only God has the authority to do: to issue a prophetic call to Amos. He had the words right (“O seer … go prophesy back home in Judah!”) but like the Wizard of Oz, when all is said and done; it is just the little man, Amaziah, in the box. Amos knew the difference between sanctimonious speech that imitates the Word of God (but really only expresses the word of the culture) and the real thing: “The Lord said to

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

me, ‘Go prophesy to my people Israel’” (10:15 NRSV), replied Amos, replacing the counterfeit word with the genuinely divine one.<sup>32</sup>

In the second account, Amos made it clear that he was a prophet by vocation and not by occupation. “I am no prophet,” he claimed. “I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees” (10:14 NRSV). He was not earning his bread (to use Amaziah’s phrase) from his prophetic activity; he was fulfilling the commission of God.

This poses direction for today’s preacher. Do we preach as an occupation where we gain money or do we preach based on our calling from God? Society has seduced preachers to go after money at the expense of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Society says, “Listen, we don’t mind your prophetic activity, just not here. Do it over there, on your own turf. There’s no money in it here, but over there you can earn your bread quite handily”?<sup>33</sup>

## **Judgment**

Prophetic criticizing discloses the discrepancies between the will of God and the present circumstances and is usually spoken in the form of judgment to both individuals and nations. For example, in Isaiah 44:9–20, the prophet began with a taunt, a dare: “All who make idols … will be put to shame” (44:9 NRSV). Then he proceeded to follow through on this challenge by calling a meeting of the international association of idol makers: “Let them all assemble, let them stand up; they shall be terrified, they shall all be put to shame” (44:11 NRSV).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

Having gathered his audience, the prophet enacted a little skit, a parody of the idol maker's craft. He depicted the ironsmiths, wood-carvers, and other artisans at their work, forging the metal, chopping down trees, stacking wood, and taking a break for lunch. There is a lot of physical exercise here; the verbs in the text—fashioning, forging, fainting, stretching, marking, cutting, planting, kindling, baking—are almost exhausting just to read. By a deft use of language, the prophet exposed one of the fatal flaws of idolatry: it exhausts human energy. Idolatry is hard work, with no replenishment. The prophet was poking fun here, quipping that one of the problems with being an idolater, with serving a God who cannot nourish or even move, is that it involves a lot of heavy lifting.<sup>35</sup>

The prophetic satire does not stop here. He pictured the idol maker tossing the wood scraps onto the factory stove: “Ah, I am warm, I can feel the fire,” coos the idolater, failing to note the rich irony in roasting lamb over the wood shavings left over from *god*. Half of the woodblock he burns in the fire, the other half he cries out to for deliverance. “Is this god, or is this firewood?” the prophet mocked. “It’s so hard to tell” (44:15–17).<sup>36</sup>

Another example of the prophetic judgment speech can be found in Micah 2:1–5. Here the prophet pronounced doom on those who, in defiance of the sacred law, greedily seize the land of others. The language is graphic; the prophet pictured these characters as dreaming up their schemes at night and then carrying them out in the daylight (2:1). Their

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

plot, evidently, was to acquire land unscrupulously, probably by using loan sharking to leverage out the rightful owners.<sup>37</sup>

This process happens in all social settings. People learn how to use systems to their own advantage to leverage power of those less powerful. When these situations arise, God sends the prophet with a word of judgment. God sees the injustice waged on the powerless by the powerful and will punish those who abuse power.

Even though God sends a word of punishment and judgment on the powerful, there is also a word of grace for the powerless. The world still belongs to God, and the judgment of God is at work to expose and destroy the greed that sucks the marrow out of human life. When the final results are in, their weeping lament will replace the heartless chuckles of the selfish.<sup>38</sup>

## **Salvation**

Prophetic energizing gives the people a word of God's promise of deliverance. In this action, the prophet provides with clarity and certainty that which God has promised to do will be achieve. "It is the task of prophetic imagination," Brueggemann claims, "to bring people to engage the promise of newness that is at work in our history with God." These promises of newness and redemption are found in texts known as "oracles of salvation," and a good example of this form is Isaiah 46. In this text, the promise of salvation has priority over judgments made for acting contrary to the will of God.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

The text begins with the familiar prophetic theme of idolatry. With bittersweet humor the prophet imagined the Babylonians fleeing the city before Cyrus' invading forces. Among the possessions being loaded onto the backs of animals are statues of their gods, Bel and Nebo. The people have bowed down and humbled themselves before these gods, but now the tables are deliciously, sadly, ironically turned: "Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle" (46:1 NRSV).<sup>40</sup>

It is over against these images of toil and the loss of energy that the prophetic oracle takes on its graphic power. The voice of the living God breaks into the weariness:

Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; "I will carry and will save (46:3–4 NRSV).

Here the Prophet beautifully points out the vast difference between the true God and idols. Having formerly said that the Babylonian gods must be drawn on wagons and carts, because they consist of dead matter, he now ascribes a widely different office to the God of Israel, namely, that he "carries" his people, like a mother, who carries the child in her womb, and afterwards carries it in her bosom.<sup>41</sup>

The images in these verses invigorate the imagination by their direct countering of the heaviness of the previous verses. The Babylonian idols must be borne by cattle; God had borne the people of Israel. The idols seemed sufficient in a day of ease, but the day of crisis exposed their emptiness; God had been present and faithful throughout the seasons, carrying Israel since birth. The idols were burdens that must be dragged through the streets, exhausting both humans and beasts, draining social resources; God does the

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

carrying, refreshing the people with creative energy. The idols must be dragged away for protection; God has made, will bear, will carry, and will save His people.

Preachers who engage this text honestly will find insight, if not shame, in this picture of the weariness of idolatrous religion. They will not have to search far to identify those places where people find the church promising refreshment but offering only a burden to be shouldered, a drain of their energies. The aim of the passage is not shame, however, but refreshment. Into the midst of this toilsomeness; God acts, renewing the faithful imagination of the people. Any idea of a God who must be borne by us, a God on our backs, is swept away by the bold announcement of this God whose “purpose shall stand” (46:10 NRSV) and who is even now shaping life toward redemption (46:13).<sup>42</sup>

Another image-rich example of a prophetic salvation oracle is found in Hosea 14, the final chapter of that book. The prophet began by rehearsing the people in a prayer of confession (14:1–3) and then moved to God’s response to that confession—a vow of redemption.<sup>43</sup>

Preachers would do well not to sprint through this text, but to view it as a wandering path through a lush garden and to pause to rest and reflect along the way. What is it that God promises a truly repentant people? First there is healing, not a generalized therapy, but a salving of their disloyalty (14:4 NRSV) and a bathing of their wounds in the liberality of God’s love. These medical images are quickly followed by metaphors of growth. God will provide the *dew*, the precious moisture, necessary for growth, and the people will prosper not only in ways that can be seen—the *blossom*—but in the deeper, hidden ways as well—the root (14:5 NRSV). The benefits of this growth

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

will be felt in an expanding arena. The “shots shall spread out” and the fragrance of their renewed life will fill the air (14:6 NRSV). In Palestine the enemy of growing plants was drought from the merciless heat of the sun. God promised to provide not only the rare moisture required for growth, but also the protection of shade, so that the people will flourish as a garden (14:7 NRSV). Now, the images shift again; it is God who is compared to a plant. I am like an evergreen cypress, strong and caring in and out of season (14:8 NRSV).<sup>44</sup>

A sermon on this text could explore each of these images, letting them take root in the imaginations of the hearers, pointing to ways in the faithful community and in the larger culture where God’s healing, nourishing, protecting hand can be felt.

## Prayers

While the priests were in the sanctuary, it was often said, the prophets were in the streets. Like most simple assessments of the prophets, this one, too, falls before the evidence. Much of the prophetic literature is punctuated by worship, by doxology and lament. Prophets spoke not only to the society; they spoke also to God, crying out in pain, wonder, and praise.<sup>45</sup>

The early Isaiah is called to his prophetic ministry in a moment of ecstatic worship, marked by hymns of awe, wrenching confession, and vows of commitment (Is 6). His prophetic message was heard in the street, but it led the people to the altar: “And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name” (Is 12:4 NRSV). Jeremiah, placed in stocks for his disturbing words, lifted up his voice in a

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

sometimes-angry prayer of lament that moved back and forth between regret and commitment (Jer. 20:7–18).<sup>46</sup>

What can preachers make of these prayers woven into the fabric of the prophetic messages? Each one of them contains, of course, its own theological vision, and its own expression of the depths of human life opened up before the divine presence. Each of these deserves sermonic treatment on its own ground. Apart from their specific content, however, these liturgical interjections reveal the intimate connection between prophecy and praise, between worship and justice. Indeed, sometimes the prophets move seamlessly from a call to righteousness to a call to worship (Am 5:6–9). Where there is no doxology, there can be no hope of a renewed human society. Where there is no quest for justice, doxologies become empty, sanctimonious, and burdensome.<sup>47</sup>

### Prophetic Voices In The Old Testament

The study of the diverse forms of prophetic literature makes it clear that Old Testament prophecy is a multifaceted jewel. The prophets spoke not in a single fashion but in many voices. They wept and sang, spun yarns, and cracked jokes. They thundered, and they whispered. They poked with a sharp stick, and they soothed with a tender hand. They conjured up courtrooms in the imagination and called forth witnesses to testify. They provoked with parables and puzzled with riddles. They used their own lives—their marriages, their children, and their occupations—as allegories. They irrigated the fields of faithful memory, but also called the people to forget the former things. They felt their messages burning like fire in their bones, and they felt their own fear like acid on their

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

tongues. They carried on disputations with the people in the name of God, then turned the other way to state the people's case against God, the charges of those who wonder if God's arm has lost its power and mercy. There is a melody in the prophetic books, but it is fashioned from many voices. There is a harmony of sorts in this material, but it is not an easy one. The prophets sang together, but in parts.

Preaching in the prophets, therefore, frustrates the preacher with a too easy scheme of analysis and a fixed set of assumptions. What is required is a flexibility of mind, and openness of spirit, and a willingness to attend to the text. Preachers must be willing to trace the contours of the text's thought, to savor its images, to feel its rhetorical power. The goal is not to repeat what Isaiah or Jeremiah or Amos has said, but to allow the force of the text to be regenerated in the sermon. When the preacher is open to both the judgment and the promise of the prophetic word, there is the hope that the sermon may become an instrument of renewed vision, a channel through which the Word may be heard and the people, in the words of Isaiah, "shall renew their strength ... shall run and not be weary ... shall walk and not faint" (40:31 NRSV).<sup>48</sup>

#### Faithful Witness in the Old Testament

Witness occurs some sixty-seven times in the Old Testament. It most commonly refers to the role of the witness in the courtroom of one who has firsthand knowledge of an event or testifies on the basis of a report of another (Lv 5:1). Israel was viewed as God's witness (Isa 43:9, 10; 44:8, 9), although the ultimate witness is God (1 Sm 12:5; Job 16:19; Jer 29:3; 42:5; Mal 3:5). Those who transgress God's covenant could be put to death only on the evidence of two witnesses (Dt 17:6; Rev 11). However, in Isaiah 40–55

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

only one witness is needed, namely, God's servant. For example, the witness is known as the servant (Is 44:1; 44:8); only Israel is needed as a witness to establish the truth—that God is one—against the nations' attacks on God's honor.<sup>49</sup>

God's anointed is like a faithful witness in the skies (Ps 89:37b). There are various possibilities as to the originally intended identity of the witness in Psalm 89. Eaton suggests the Davidic kings themselves make a perpetual witness. Those immersed in the literature and temple liturgy of the Bible might have conflated the text with Isaiah 55:4 in which the witness describes God's servant.

Israel is also the faithful witness. In a controversy between the LORD and the false gods, God is represented by Israel and the world by the pagan nations (Is 50–55). Israel is to be a light to the nations (Is 42:6–7; 43:10, 12; 44:8). The peoples are gathered together (41:1) and judgment will follow (41:11). Judgment is the justice, which will proceed from the testimony that God's witness gives (42:1, 4). The witness/servant is portrayed as one who is an example of suffering patience (42:1–4). In the context of the courtroom, God gives his enemies an opportunity to present their case through their witnesses (43:9–10). However, when they have no case, God's witnesses are charged to declare the truth so that justice might follow.

Suffering is a consequence of the faithful testimony that the servant gives (Is 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). Although the servant is not called a *witness*, the servant functions similarly to the servant in the preceding songs. The language is of the law court (50:8–9) and the servant is one who argues the case of God (50:4) and suffers as a result of the word of God that he must speak (50:6–7).

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<sup>49</sup>Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), 159–60.

Israel is described as God's servant in a way that compares her role to God's witness (41:9 and 43:10, 12). Von Rad writes: "When Deutero-Isaiah describes Israel as a "witness" for the nations (Is 43:10; 44:8; 55:4), he is not thinking of sending out messengers to them [the nations]."<sup>50</sup> In the prophet's mind, Israel is thought of rather as a sign of which the Gentiles are to become aware'. Von Rad plays down the idea of a missionary being sent to proclaim a message. However, the witness is more than just a sign. Trites writes: "It is the task of the witness not only to attest the facts but also to convince the opposite side of the truth of them."<sup>51</sup> Caird comments that the most important aim of the witness 'was not to convince judge and jury, but to convince the adversary, so that he would withdraw his own case and acknowledge defeat'. In other words, God's witnesses hope that people will deny the beast and then turn to God.<sup>52</sup>

### Congruence With The New Testament

Lampe suggests that, although influenced by the Old Testament, the Christian understanding of faithful witness is distinctive. He sees suffering and death, in the Old Testament, resulting from a defensive aspect, whereas in the Christian's case it was not merely a matter of passive resistance, but of active testifying to the gospel. He writes: 'The Christian was essentially a missionary, and martyrdom was for him the most supreme and most effective mode of evangelism'. Similarly, von Campenhausen argues that martyrdom can only be spoken of where the suffering is expressly related to the idea of witness bearing, and not to loyalty to the Law, as in the Old Testament. Hengel writes

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

that there is no superhuman transfiguration of the martyr because it is completely alien to the Old Testament.

However, in an examination of the Old Testament, Christian developments of witness activity are present in the Old Testament, especially in the prophets. John advocates that faithful witnesses should be active in proclaiming the gospel until death to the nations hoping that they, too, will come to accept Jesus' testimony as truth. Therefore, a faithful witness is a middleman of God before the nations. The Old Testament is influential upon John both in providing examples of heroes within the tradition, but also heroes who were active in witnessing to the nations. The Old Testament does not simply contain traditions that are introspective and concerned simply with social control through advocating separation from the world. Within the Old Testament are the seeds of an ideology in which God's servants, through their faithfulness, aim to bring about a transformation of their enemy to live according to the principles God established. They are God's middlemen to the world.

### Witness in The Book of Acts

In the New Testament, ὁ μάρτυς *witness* occurs especially in the forensic sense (Mt 18:16; 26:65; Mk 14:63 and elsewhere). The risen Jesus commissions his disciples to be 'my witnesses' in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; 22:15). The role of Jesus' followers is to testify to the world the truth that they have received from God. Truth is the resurrection of Jesus to which a witness must testify (1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32). Jesus' followers are witnesses to the whole life of Jesus and all that he did including his death (10:39; 1 Pet. 5:1). For Luke, these are not only those who are eyewitnesses to

Jesus' ministry, but also those to whom God has given the gift of being a witness.

According to Acts, Paul sees his role as servant and witness even though he had not been with Jesus from the beginning (26:16). Marshall sees the influence of Isaiah 42:6–7 on Acts 26:18, in which the servant is to be a light to the nations. Luke is also influenced by the forensic use of witness in Acts 6:13. Stephen is set up as the complement of Jesus who, like Jesus, is challenged on the same charges by false witnesses (Acts 7:58). The fate of Stephen is that of a martyr as with Jesus. His martyrdom is intimately connected with his role as witness. Luke shows the correlation between Stephen's witness and his death (Acts 22:20).<sup>53</sup>

### Witness in Revelation

#### **Revelation 1:2, 5**

John who bore witness to the ‘testimony of Jesus’ (1:2). Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead (1:5). Faithful witness is influenced by Psalm 89:37b in which the unending witness of the moon is compared to the unending reign of David’s seed. John probably links together Psalm 89:37b and Isaiah 55:4. The king establishes God’s justice, which is central to the role of God’s chosen (Ps 45:4, 7; 72:1–2, 4, 12; 110:6). John is concerned to depict Jesus as a witness in the forensic sense. As a witness he seeks to establish justice similarly to the Davidic king. John has not necessarily in mind church members standing trial before the court; rather, he may have in mind Jesus’ trials before the Sanhedrin and Pilate. Moreover, the law-court language is metaphorical. The law-court for the Israelites was the only context in which they experienced a

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<sup>53</sup>Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), 160–72.

systematic quest for truth. In Revelation, the conflict is between the beast that tempts and seduces the world, and God's witnesses who defend God and seek the transformation of those who have been seduced by the beast. The witness can accept and embrace the accusations of their opponent as a way of reinforcing their truth claims. One such response is to die rather than deny God.

Faithful witness describes Jesus (1:5; 3:14) and Antipas in 2:13 (11:3 and 17:6 in which only 'witness' is used). Trites detects a five stage diachronic development whereby μάρτυς (witness) became synonymous with *martyr*. He observes that witness originally belongs in the court of law with no expectation of death. In its final stage such an idea of witness disappears and it refers only to martyrdom. Certainly μάρτυς undergoes a change in meaning from the forensic sense in Isaiah 40–55 to the martyr understanding in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*. Trites' application of a five stage diachronic development of μάρτυς is, however, unnecessary. Isaiah 40–55, for example, shows that suffering and death resulted from the testimony that a witness might give. Brownlee rightly observes that: 'the association of τύ (witness) with the suffering servant perhaps prepared the way for the early use of ὁ μάρτυς in the sense of martyr'. I have shown that suffering and death may be a consequence of delivering a testimony. Therefore, witness and suffering are related at a much earlier stage than Trites allows.

Faithful witness' is placed beside firstborn from the dead; thus John establishes a relationship between witness and death. John is called a servant of God because he testified to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (v. 2). Testimony of Jesus can be the witness to Jesus that John gives. This means that John teaches and witnesses about Jesus' death, rather than the testimony, which Jesus gives. However, the testimony Jesus

gives before the world is expressed in his life and death. Therefore, John testifies to the testimony Jesus gave in his life, death, and resurrection. Thus, an understanding of the Christology of Revelation must take into account Jesus as a witness who dies as a result of the lived and spoken testimony that he gave.<sup>54</sup>

The testimony of Jesus is that which a witness gives. It is a distinguishing characteristic which all who follow Christ have in common, that is the testimony of Jesus (19:10). On five occasions, testimony is related with Jesus (1:2 [Christ is added]; 1:9; 12:17; 19:10 [twice]; 20:4). The word group is used repeatedly in conjunction with the deaths of Christians. It is often associated with death resulting from giving witness to God (6:9; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 20:4). On three occasions, it means the testimony given by the witness (6:9; 11:7; 12:11) and in 6:9 and 11:7 the witnesses have been martyred because of their testimony.

Jesus, like Israel in Isaiah 43, is called to give testimony on God's behalf. There is something of the prophet understood in the title witness as well as the suffering servant. The prophet came to be understood as a martyr by the first century CE; moreover, the prophet/servant/witness of Isaiah 53 suffered as a consequence of his testimony. Thus, the phrase testimony of Jesus suggests a testimony Jesus gave to others, the verbal witness of Jesus, summed up at his trial and his obedience to his Father, in his life especially in Gethsemane and on the cross. His witness before Pilate was a known tradition in the early church (1 Tm 6:13). Jesus' death resulted from his testimony, therefore, establishes a link between death and witness.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

Jesus' refusal to play the power games of his oppressor is critical to testimony. His testimony is to accept the condemned condition. He embraces his suffering and rejection and in this way stands firm before his condemners. J. H. Yoder comments that:

Suffering is not a tool to make people come around, nor a good in itself. But the kind of faithfulness that is willing to accept defeat rather than complicity with evil is, by virtue of its conformity with what happens to God when he works among us, aligned with the ultimate triumph of the Lamb.

There is something of this in Jesus' sending out of his disciples as sheep among wolves (Mt 10:16). Neil and Travis observe that too often followers of Christ when faced by wolves adopt the tactics of the wolves—to play the power game, or to rely on the security of schemes and organizations. Too easily we forget that we are sent out as sheep by one who himself was led like a sheep to the slaughter (Is 53:7). The essential witness is not to be like the wolves but to persuade them by unconditional love. The ultimate expression of this witness is inevitably to die rather than apostatize. Therefore, martyr and witness are closely linked.<sup>56</sup>

### **Revelation 1:9**

John tells the churches that the reason for him being on Patmos was because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (6:9). John is one who pursued a lifestyle, modeled on Jesus, which was in harmony with the suffering servant/witness of Isaiah and elsewhere.

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

### **Revelation 2:13**

Antipas is held up as an example of one who died because he held fast to the name of Jesus. John has Jesus describe Antipas as my witness, my faithful one. Antipas is a witness to Jesus and this means that he is a witness to God as was Jesus. The witness Jesus gave to God inspires the faithful to bear witness to the witness Jesus gave, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (19:10; 22:9). The message of Jesus is the essence of prophetic proclamation.<sup>50</sup> Jesus is associated with the tradition of prophets and servants of God, yet is the supreme example. Just as it was the destiny of the Old Testament prophets to experience persecution, suffering, and death for the sake of their message, so it is also the lot of the prophetic witnesses of Jesus. Jesus has become the message in the same way that those who die for a cause can become immortalized within the message, they, too, become the message. Antipas stays faithful to God's promises through standing firm to the message that Jesus testified, that is to keep God's commandments (12:17). Antipas is a prophet of the New Covenant with Jesus as the Lord. Although Antipas was not numbered among the distinct group of prophets (11:18; 16:6 and 18:24), Sweet points out: 'potentially all the Lord's people were prophets—if they were true to their baptismal vocation—and all were called to the same witness as their Lord, and the same result'.<sup>57</sup>

### **Revelation 6:9–10**

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?'

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

With the opening of the fifth seal John sees under the altar those slain for the word of God and the witness they had borne (the Greek has ‘the testimony *which they had*’). It is not stated that the testimony, which they had, was the testimony of Jesus. Yet this is often assumed in that the testimony, which the faithful had, is that of Jesus. Still, the text does not say this. We must assign some significance to this. John is referring to those faithful witnesses to God’s word who have died because of the testimony *they had*. The identity of the souls is not made explicit. Beale suggests that the souls are those who have recently died for their witness to Jesus. However, it is more likely that John has in mind a broader category of innocent people who have been murdered for their testimony, which accounts for John’s omission of Jesus with testimony. John deliberately omits Jesus and has only witness as the Old Testament prophets had not the witness of Jesus. Caird believes also that John meant to include the martyrs of the Old Testament, for the cry “How Long?” had echoed down centuries of oppression. Also in Psalm 79, God’s servants and holy ones are murdered, their bodies are treated dishonorably (2–3; the death of the two witness) and they cry out: ‘How Long, O Lord?’ The Psalmist looks for vengeance (10, 12).

### **Historical Foundation**

In this section the writer will list the particular historical events, which have impacted the need for his doctoral project, and what attempts have been made historically to rectify the situation. The three areas to be considered are: The past climate and philosophy of urban African American churches, past (and present) attempts to respond to the issue and past denominational influences.

The Past Climate And Philosophy Of  
Urban African American Churches.

In the National Baptist Convention church members are considered young up to the age of thirty-five. It is the young people who are and must be reached and brought back. Most of the northern African American churches, those at least forty to fifty years old, came into existence because of the Great Migrations of African Americans from the south to the north, after the World Wars. These migrations have been well documented and certainly the writer can add no new information about them. For many African Americans, the north was a place of better opportunities and employment. The promise of better jobs lured them from southern states like Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi to northern cities such as Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, etc. E. Franklin Frazier states in his classic book *The Negro Church in America/The Black Church Since Frazier* (co-authored with C. Eric Lincoln):

Until the First World War about nine-tenths of the Negroes were still in the South and about four-fifths of those in the south lived in rural areas. The war created an unprecedented demand on the part of northern industries for workers, especially large numbers of unskilled workers. The war had cut off the immigration of workers from Europe and many immigrant workers returned to Europe in order to fight for their homelands. As a result of the mass movements from the south large Negro communities were created in the metropolitan areas of the North.

This style of worship is what today is called traditional for urban African American churches. Some of the more common elements of the Black Baptist inner-city churches included Negro spirituals, hymns by Isaac Watts called Dr. Watts hymns, the later gospel songs, the distinctive call and response sermon event where Amen's are prominent, including whooping preachers, etc. Some of the more common church events and activities in most of these churches include: the formation of State Clubs (originally to aid the church financially), The Pastor's Aid Club, afternoon programs, anniversaries,

Deacon Boards, Trustee Boards, Deaconess Boards, and the Mother's Board. There were also usually a number of choirs, which catered to a certain type of music or age group. The older members usually populated the senior choirs and they usually sung anthems, hymns, spirituals, and songs with a slower rhythm. With the growing popularity of Gospel Music, Gospel Choirs began to emerge in the forties, fifties and sixties. These were singing groups usually populated by the young adults to middle-agers. The names James Cleveland and Shirley Caesar are associated with the early Gospel Music Period. It is a well-known fact that many of the Black artists who went on to fame singing Soul music, began in the Black church during that time. Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, and so many others had their roots in the urban Black church.

Most of these churches also had a youth or children's choir. Often they were given some appropriate name such as the 'Little Angels Choir' or the 'Sunbeam Choir'. And many were also named after the pastor of the church. The songs that they sung were appropriate for their ages.

The northern Black churches from the time of the Great Migrations to the present were normally larger than the southern churches and they took on a different spiritual philosophy. The Black northern churches began to focus more on societal problems in addition to the more spiritual/heavenly aspects of their faith. In the book Religion in America one of the contributing editors states that, "Black preachers in a number of northern cities became influential in politics. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell began his career as a pastor of the Abyssinia Baptist Church in New York City, where he was prominent as an activist leader of Black boycotts against businesses that would not hire afro-Americans."

Most scholars would agree that up until the mid-1960s church attendance was booming. After that time mainline churches all across this country began to decline in attendance. This was true of African American churches as well. Most scholars agree that one of the primary reasons for the decline in church attendance was because of the cultural shift from modernity to post-modernity. During the modern times, the times before the decline, there was more of a natural acceptance of authority and tradition. Divorces were less frequent and families were more apt to stay together. This type of cultural climate made church attendance, as a family unit, easier to occur. Also during those times it was understood that people, including young people, were to conform to the traditions and way of the church. The church was not to conform to the people. These were the unarticulated values that were expressed during that period of time. It was not necessary that young people be actually ministered to at the point of life where they were, it was important that they come to church and support the church. They would receive salvation if they did that. User-friendly churches were unheard of. Since it was the period where people did as they were told, young people attended anyway and accepted the way things were.

However with the advent of post-modernity, with its questioning of the existence of absolute truth, old traditions were now being challenged. The sixties were a period of revolution on a number of fronts. People, including young people in the African American community, began to seek fulfillment in places other than the mainline church. The shift from modernity to post-modernity is not the only reason for the decline in church attendance, but it is a significant one. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger state in their book *Emerging Churches*:

Furthermore they (younger emerging generations) are disillusioned with institutionalism and see the church itself as an obstacle to faith. Many churches fail to live out the faith they profess, at least in the estimation of those who taunt them. Consequently, postmodern generations have simply chosen to ignore the organized church as irrelevant to their spiritual quest.

They go on further to say:

Thus, the modern church of their Boomer parents does not satisfy the yearnings of the under-forties, and that is why Gen-Xers increasingly participate in churches with pre-Reformation histories.

Certainly there were a few activities and programs specifically for that younger group during the modern times. There were the Young People's Sunday school classes, Young Laymen and Matrons groups, and the aforementioned Children's Choirs. However during those modern times the young people were expected to come to church and conform, not be ministered to. And in keeping with the climate of the time, they did just that. Ministries such as parenting classes, singles ministries, divorce groups, couples ministries, aerobics classes, etc., were not a part of the norm for most Black churches during the times before the sixties. The children were always ministered to, and certainly the seniors were comfortable, but that mid-age young group had the challenge of accepting the church as it was and attempting to conform to it. Unfortunately that is still the case in a number of traditional churches. This is why the Gen-Xers, or Busters (the group born after the Baby Boomers), have left. George G. Hunter III, in his book, *Radical Outreach* effectively sums up the plight of mainline traditional churches, regardless of the race. He calls them by a collective name of 'Old East Side Church' and states:

Old East Side Church cannot retain a bare majority of its own young people into adult discipleship. This is the dirty little secret of Protestant Christianity in the U.S.A. with its teenagers, Old East Side practices a form of "insanity" defined by the Recovery Community as "doing the same thing over and over, each time expecting a different result". Old East Side Church still "does church" much like it did in the 1950s.

As stated earlier, church leaders of that period has no malice toward any specific age group. And the writer is fully aware that being in church enriches all lives. Many who grew up and stayed with the church now see the benefits of their perseverance. They grew up during a time when obligation and loyalty to a church, a job, and a marriage was expected and stressed more. Many individuals who came to church came out of obligation. Those who did not quite *get it*, like the youth, understood that they should still be there. Also those who had serious life issues and problems knew that they were to repent, not expect to be ministered to. In the past, the idea of ministering to divorced people was unheard of! The idea of ministering to those struggling with drug dependency was unthinkable. Those were the hush-hush things that were not to be discussed or brought to the church.

#### Past And Present Attempts To Respond To This Issue

The decline in church attendance, especially with the Gen-Xers, has already been discussed and has been studied by many. Nonetheless the Gen-Xers who did continue to go to church did so by adopting others mean. As the seventies approached a number of new cultural phenomena occurred. They were the Charismatic Movement (also known as the Pentecostal Movement), the rise in popularity of Contemporary Christian Music, and the proliferation of the contemporary/mega churches. There were other factors as well, helping to keep and attract younger people and people who had become disillusioned with the traditional church.

The Charismatic Movement is well documented. It had its beginning in 1906 in Los Angeles. The movement has cut across denominational lines. A number of scholars

believe that it reached its peak in the mid-seventies. Hunter states concerning the Pentecostal movement:

The most obvious response to the cultural imperialism of Western Churches and missions was the worldwide Pentecostal movement. The movement began in 1906 among urban, down-and-out, disenfranchised, unlettered African American, Hispanic, and Anglo people in the now-famous Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles. Within a year, it spread to every continent; it grew from nothing to over 400 million people in less than a century. It stands, today, as a contagious alternative to the historical denominations almost everywhere.

It is certainly not the intention of this paper to delve deeply into the movement, only to say that the energy and spontaneity of the movement attracted many young people. The movement is still quite prominent today.

The rise of Contemporary Christian Music has also been a great factor in attracting and retaining young people. For the African American church, this began in the seventies with artists such as Andre Crouch, The Winans etc., and has continued to the present with artist such as John P. Kee, Kirk Franklin and Christian rap artists. Contemporary Christian Music of today is now one to three generations removed from the James Cleveland, Andrea Crouch, Winans heyday (although Crouch and the Winans are still very much involved in Christian Music).

Closely (but not exclusively) associated with Contemporary Christian Music is the contemporary mega church. McIntosh States:

Depending on whose research study you read, the typical church in the United States still has an average of only seventy-five to one-hundred people attending worship each Sunday morning. Yet approximately every three weeks another church enters the league of a *mega church*.

To be a mega church, a church must have a minimum of two thousand members. In 1970 there were only ten such churches. Today it is estimated that more than eight thousand mega churches exist in the United States.

The mega church is a relatively new phenomenon and some of its characteristics include: greater use of technology, newer buildings often called a complex, upbeat contemporary services, multiple services, a multiplicity of ministries, drama and praise dance ministries, small group ministries, practical life application preaching, etc. These churches and ministries, because of their particular characteristics, appeal to younger Christians as well as those who were previously unchurched. They are more in tune with where people are today and have less emphasis on past traditions and denominational ties. Indeed, most of these newer contemporary churches consider themselves to be non-denominational.

These three cultural phenomena have been mentioned because they served, correctly or incorrectly depending on one's view of them, to stem the tide of young people leaving the church and they have worked.

### Denominational Influence

The African American Baptist churches in this country now have four national conventions. The three oldest are the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. (NBC), the National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA) and the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC). In 1988 in Dallas, Texas, the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America was formed. In all four conventions membership is voluntary and none of the Conventions have any governing authority over its churches. The online article by Jacqueline Trussell states, "September is traditionally the month when Black Baptist from around the country travel and join other Baptists in meetings to lift spirits, hear reports and raise money for programs and projects. These annual sessions reflect a long and sometimes complicated history."

She quotes Benjamin Mays:

The great importance attached to the political maneuvering of a National Baptist Convention...can be explained in part by the fact the Negro is largely cut off from leadership in the body public. The local churches, associations, conventions, and conferences become the Negro's Democratic and Republican Conventions, his Legislature, his Senate and House of Representatives.

Certainly, the political climate has improved for the African American somewhat since Dr. Mays first wrote those words, however most of his statement is still true.

However for this study, of more importance are the National Sunday school Congresses and Educational conferences, which are a sub-division to these conventions. The NBC Congress of Christian Education usually meets in June and it is there where classes are taught on how to improve the different ministries of the local churches. Classes are offered on a wide variety of subjects related to the church and they are taught by some of the best Baptist preachers and teachers in the country.

In the author's opinion, the NBC has made earnest efforts to be more relevant with the issues of today's churches. However, because most Baptist churches that attend the Convention are traditional, with seasoned older pastors, the Convention has more of a traditional bent. Nonetheless in the Congresses more and more classes have been offered which deal with the relevant issues of today. Issues that the Black church did not have to deal with (or would not deal with) in past generations are now being addressed. Issues such as abortion, divorce recovery, AIDS, etc. There has also always been a whole division in the Congress on issues for children and teenagers. Unfortunately, there have never been many classes to deal specifically with how to make a traditional church more inviting to them in a wholesale manner. Historically the NBC Congress even with its

well-meaning intentions has not adequately addressed the problem that this project is trying to address.

### **Theological Foundation**

The writer believes that the primary theological foundation for his proposed project is the inclusivity of the church. From the very beginning of the church its purpose was to reach out to the entire world (Mt 28:18-20). While it is understood that the context of that scripture is referring to different ethnic groups, races, and peoples, it can also include all generations as well. For there to be a *missing generation* in so many churches, it means that a subtle form of religious segregation has been occurring. And either many church leaders do not care that the missing generation does not attend, or are frustrated as to how to get them back. However churches must be inclusive. They must do what is necessary to bring any and every missing group back.

While some of the reasons for the current state of affairs of the churches have been discussed in the earlier section of this paper, the reasons do not justify or excuse the problem. Post-modernity, high divorce rates, single-parent homes, etc. are all a part of this society. However the biblical mandate remains the same. God's house is to be a house of prayer for all people. In order for that to occur the church must learn to be relevant to all age groups, not just to one or two. Dr. George G. Hunter III made a very interesting and insightful observation about the relevance of the church:

Contrary to what most church leaders have heard, all worship services are "contemporary"! The problem is that most of the worship services... are "contemporary" to some other culture, or some prior generation, or both. Without a doubt, the traditional church was once wonderful and still serves traditional church members who have strong roots in the past. The challenge (and opportunity), however, is to shape liturgy and church life in ways indigenous to the cultures in the community, in this generation.

The Apostle Paul manifested a spirit of inclusively when he wrote in I Corinthians 9:22, “To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” If Paul was willing to do that for the salvation of the unsaved of different cultures, should not church members be willing to at least do the same for the younger generation in their community? What is required of them is not to be young but be more accepting of the ways of the young. An individual in his or her fifties or sixties is not expected to have the same likes and preferences as young people. They are in a different season of life. Inclusivity is not about everyone liking or preferring the same styles of worship and songs, it is about accepting that someone else likes it, and loving them anyway.

How ironic; many churches have supported missionary programs to take the gospel to foreign lands, and yet have unknowingly (and in some cases knowingly) practiced religious discrimination with the younger generations in their own church!

In order for the church to be inclusive, especially toward Gen-Xers (the group in their twenties and thirties), it must make efforts to meet them where they are. That is the true spirit of inclusivity. This requires that there be real and substantive changes. Those changes must occur with as much grace, sensitivity, and love as possible. This is the true Christian way. While the problem addressed in this doctoral project is concerning the equipping of young adults and youth to evangelize people in their age group; the church still exists for all age groups. The older generation in traditional churches is not to be ignored. They are presently the backbone of the church.

The writer borrows heavily from the lessons that the church has been forced to learn from past missionary efforts in foreign lands. From past experiences, churches have

come to learn that new church plants on foreign soil had a better chance of surviving and thriving when they became indigenous to the people of that land. Before learning that information, prior missionary efforts failed to see the difference between spreading the gospel and spreading the missionary's cultural preferences.

As a result, while the early missionaries did untold good, their success relied heavily on the missionaries maintaining a presence in the foreign community. Hence, missionary camps with missionary-led churches, hospitals, schools and some housing, sprung up. Primarily the missionaries would run them and the natives were taught not only the gospel but Western cultural traditions as well. The indigenous people were taught that their way of life, even their non-sinful practices and customs, were wrong. They were taught that they must change all those things (sins and cultural practices) to be saved. This led to great misunderstanding, violence, and in some cases death, to missionaries.

Certainly the missionaries were motivated by love and the biblical mandate to spread the gospel. What they needed, however, was a realization that their well-intended way of evangelizing was not inclusive of the culture of that land. Charles H. Kraft writes concerning the issue of cultural relevance:

We have continually reverted to the assumption that becoming a Christian means becoming like us culturally. When, after New Testament times, the church required everyone to adopt Roman culture, God raised up Luther to prove that God could accept people who spoke German and worshipped in German ways. Then Anglicanism arose to show that God could use English language and customs, and Wesleyanism arose to let the common people of England know that God accepted them in their culture.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>“Worldviews and Culture: Interacting with Charles Kraft”, [http://www.berith.org/pdf/Worldviews\\_Culture.pdf](http://www.berith.org/pdf/Worldviews_Culture.pdf) (accessed January 2012).

While vestiges of this type of thinking still exist, many missionary agencies are now trying to be more relevant and culturally inclusive with indigenous peoples. They are trying to bring the gospel into the culture where the people are. The writer's purpose here is not to give an overview of the history of missions. It is to show that just like Western missionary agencies had to learn to be sensitive to foreign cultures, American Black churches have sub-cultures in their own community. They must be equally inclusive with them.

Since this project has a dual purpose of both presenting changes and presenting them in a loving way as possible, the writer's next theological foundation is love. This will be a new way of expressing love for many Christians because traditional church members are not accustomed to thinking of love as it relates to how believers do church. More often than not they view different worship styles and evangelism methods and ways of doing church with distain and not acceptance. One need only look at the age-old animosities that different denominations have had toward one another. The layperson's distain is often not over theological issues, such as whether a person is a Calvinist or an Arminian, or whether they are conservative or liberal in their theology—scholars, Bible teachers and pastors discuss those issues. The laypersons of those different denominations get *fired up* over worship styles and the way evangelism is conveyed. True agape (Christian) love must be taught in the area of worship styles and methods of witnessing and evangelism as well. This is a new concept, which has not been adequately addressed.

Even younger people are not immune from thinking negatively about church styles and preferences, which do not appeal to them. They also must be taught that while

another style of worship may not be for them, it is still to be respected and appreciated. However the younger people are not to be judged as harshly as their older Christian brothers and sisters in this area, as they are younger and less mature. Yet they do need to be made aware of their error. The body of Christ needs much more of this type of expression of love in the area of worship preferences.

In his article, “*A Theology of Evangelism: The Heart of the Matter,*” William J. Abraham, a Professor of Evangelism and of Philosophy of Religion, of the Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University in the United States of America wrote: “The central task of a theology of evangelism is to provide a clear and credible account of the ministry of evangelism that will foster and illuminate responsible evangelistic practices by the Church and its agents in the modern world.”<sup>59</sup>

As a topic of inquiry, Evangelism falls within the domain of both systematic and practical theology. It falls within the purview of ecclesiology, i.e., the doctrine of the church. Evangelism then is central to any comprehensive analysis of the mission and task of the church.

Evangelism has always been defined on the basis of verbal considerations related to the etymology of the expression, evangelism. Clearly, the central verb used to cover the activity of evangelism; *evangelizomai* is best rendered by the English verb “to proclaim.” On the basis of this word, which, to the mind of many scholars, is of limited value when it comes to the definition of evangelism, evangelism points to the proclamation of the good news of the gospel? So Christians, from very diverse backgrounds have defined evangelism as proclamation.

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<sup>59</sup>A Theology of Evangelism, <http://www.thechristiansentinel.com/2008/09/a-theology-of-evangelism/>, (accessed January 2012).

Such a definition of evangelism, however, cannot be sustained. Deriving a vision of evangelism merely from verbal considerations related to the etymology of evangelism leaves much to be desired. The history of evangelism clearly confirms that evangelism goes beyond proclamation of the good news. Evangelism, in the patristic period clearly indicated that the task included the formation of Christians. In other words, evangelism, in the patristic period, was hardly confined merely to proclamation. The extensive use of individual and corporate spiritual direction focused on the incorporation of converts into the Church and into the life of faith. According to Abraham, “especially interesting, with respect to corporate spiritual direction, is development of the catechumenate.<sup>60</sup>

Considerable care, according to Abraham, “was taken to ensure that seekers really knew the gospel for themselves and to see that they were well grounded in the basic content and practices of the faith.”<sup>61</sup> Grounding converts in the basic content and practices of the faith was absolutely essential if commitment was to be substantial and sustained.

According to Abraham, it is “totally impractical and spiritually dangerous to restrict the work of evangelism to proclamation.”<sup>62</sup> In the early Church and even in the medieval period in Europe, it was absolutely essential that converts be baptized and minimally established in the faith. The same is true for the great outburst of missionary activity that arose in the nineteenth century. All of this is to say that principally, evangelism involves the proclamation of the gospel, and the grounding of converts to Christianity in the basic content and practices of the faith, through teaching. This raises

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

the question regarding the content of the gospel and what constitutes basic Christian initiation.

According to Aram Digennaro, evangelism must lead to the acknowledgement and actualization of God's reign. He believes that true evangelism will result in holistic transformation of those who preach and those who hear. In a similar vein as Pauline scholars such as Wright, Walter Brueggeman argues that evangelism is best understood as a message about a cosmic victory by God. He presents several examples from both Old and New Testaments where this message of victory is presented in a way that captures and transforms the imagination. Through this message, outsiders to the faith become insiders, the imagination and theological memory of forgetful insiders is renewed, and children are nurtured into believing adults.<sup>63</sup> The gospel is glimpsed, expressed, and appropriated in ways that are always changing and ever new. When heard, the gospel requires personal appropriation, which cannot avoid transforming the consciousnesses, the lives, and the societies of those who hear.

Evangelism is no safe church activity that will sustain a conventional church, nor a routine enterprise that will support a status quo . . . The news that God has triumphed means that a transformed life, i.e., one changed by the hearing of the news, works to bring more and more of life, personal and public under the rule of this world-transforming, slave-liberating, covenant-making, promise-keeping, justice-commanding God.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>New Perspectives on Evangelism: Insights from Biblical Theology, <http://www.thepaulpage.com/new-perspectives-on-evangelism-insights-from-biblical-theology/>(accessed March 2012).

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

Evangelism conceived as the proclamation of King Jesus also circumvents many unproductive and ultimately illusory divisions between word and deed, *evangelism* and discipleship, proclamation and social action, preaching and serving, etc. The whole life of the church, that institution continually confronted and transformed by the gospel; both constitutes, enables, and requires evangelism, the proclamation of the gospel. This holistic view of evangelism is affirmed by Joe Jones, who defines evangelism as “all those ways in which the church conveys to the world the Good News of Jesus Christ and invites the world to respond to this news with renewal of life and new hope. Evangelism is practiced when the church intends its witness to the reality of God in Christ to be received in faith and the adoption of a new way of life.”<sup>65</sup>

Evangelism can be conceived as a set of practices. These include, but are not limited to, verbal acts of communication, all having as their intention an invitational witness. The proclamation of the gospel should be an intention behind many, many practices of the church, which seek to enact, demonstrate, and convey to others the lordship of Christ and the Reign of God.

The sense of evangelism as coercion can ultimately be combated by the fruitful lives of Christians who make peace and who live lives of bold but vulnerable witness. On the other hand, in a liberal society where proselytization is discouraged for any point of view except tolerance, part of the unacceptability of evangelism is unavoidable. We should not be surprised, the cross is a scandal from the beginning, and the kingdom of God is not primarily a lesson in citizenship for the kingdoms of the world. This, the biblical message of God’s victory, is the gospel; evangelism is singing

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

this song with our voices, our storytelling to strangers, our vocational choices, our marital commitments, our economic practices, and even our suffering.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

For years, the mainline institutional church has been in somewhat of a death spiral it seems because of the lack of evangelism and witnessing on the part of young adults and youth. Statistics show that mainline denominational churches are in a steady decline and many have all but closed their doors. Average attendance across all denominational lines is less than 100 congregants per Sunday, hardly enough people, and resources to maintain and sustain a healthy congregation. With the advent of the worldwide web, technological advancement in multisensory worship experiences and most recently, the emergence of social media and social networking, the church has not found a way to capitalize on what has been obvious to the rest of the world; people are finding new and effective ways to communicate and relate to one another in meaningful ways. To combat this epidemic, the writer is compelled, based on his own personal journey with God to recommend a remedy to this phenomenon for the church in general and for the African American Baptist church in particular.

As previously stated, the purpose of this project is to show that prophetic preaching can change the hearts and minds of young people, enabling them to be inspired about witnessing, transformation and empowerment. The presupposition upon which this project is based is that if young adults and youth are exposed to ongoing prophetic

preaching that is relevant in addressing systemic issues they face on a regular basis, and if they are equipped with appropriate ways and tools to share the gospel message with their peers, an increase in overall church growth will be the result. It was the researchers desire to use qualitative research, entrance interviews, pre and post surveys, sermons, workshops, and exit interviews to test his hypothesis and presuppositions. While several deviations were necessary and employed, the methodology was still able to garner sufficient. This project will be able to measure, evaluate, and present findings through biblical liberation and black theology to transform the mindset and emotions of the young adult congregants.

Ultimately, the project model consisted of a workshop, a sermon, and a Bible study equipping the congregation; especially the young adults and youth on utilizing prophetic preaching and evangelism to fill the pews and build the membership of the church.

### **Sermon On Gospel of John**

The sermon was a prophetic sermon, preached from the prophetic preaching style, which engaged listeners around prevalent issues of hospitality, servanthood, and authentic relationships. The sermon captured how to seize every moment to do well and take advantage of evangelistic opportunities.

Based on sound exegesis and hermeneutics, the sermon made relevant the need to share the Good News of Jesus Christ as an evangelistic act. The sermon was preached during Sunday morning worship. A brief qualitative question and answer form was provided to the congregation prior to worship. The participants in worship that

Sunday were encouraged to supply answers to each question as they listened and received revelatory knowledge from God's Word at the conclusion of the sermon.

The context associates, along with the ushers of the church, were responsible for administering the question and answer forms as well as retrieving them at the end of worship. The questions used for the sermon series were:

- 1) Do you have a strong understanding about witnessing (evangelism)?
- 2) Do you have a biblical definition of witnessing (evangelism)?
- 3) Do you honestly witness (evangelize)?
- 4) Are there distractions that deter you from witnessing (evangelizing)?
- 5) Do you have a willingness or unwillingness to witness (evangelize)?

Answers for the sermon were identified and grouped. After the sermon had been preached and all forms received, the answers were tabulated, analyzed, and codified to determine the pulse of those who participated. This approach was used to allow the participant to fully engage the text being preached, dialogue with the writer regarding their discernment of God's Word, and to articulate their intrinsic feelings about the subject matter in relationship to God's will. Each question was designed to challenge each member participating to self-reflect on what it means to be stimulated and compelled by prophetic preaching causing them to go and witness to others about their relationship with the Lord.

## Bible Study

- The biblical teaching consisted of the Bible study regarding the book of John 4. The study focused on how Jesus used a woman with a questionable lifestyle enabling her to be a liberating evangelist to the entire village. A question and answer form was provided for the Bible study to assess knowledge gained from each participant. Each participant in the Bible study was encouraged to complete a question and answer form. At the end of the Bible study, the forms were tabulated and analyzed by the writer and the context associates. The questions for the Bible study were the same as for the sermon.
- 1) Do you have a strong understanding about witnessing (evangelism)?
  - 2) Do you have a biblical definition of witnessing (evangelism)?
  - 3) Do you honestly witness (evangelize)?
  - 4) Are there distractions that deter you from witnessing (evangelizing)?
  - 5) Do you have a willingness or unwillingness to witness (evangelize)?

## Evangelism Workshop

The final process in this project was a workshop on how to engage young adults and youth specifically and the congregation generally on the attributes of witnessing and evangelism. The workshop was designed to provide an understanding and awareness of the difference between evangelism and discipleship and the importance of seeing them as a part of a whole movement of soul winning. A brief questionnaire was given at the conclusion of the workshop to determine the level of knowledge acquired as a result of

the workshop. The questionnaire was received by the context associates, tabulated, codified, and analyzed. Questions were as follows:

- 1) Did you know the Great Commission is about discipleship and evangelism?
- 2) Do you know the difference between evangelism and discipleship?
- 3) Is evangelism something that only pastors and leaders do?
- 4) Young adults have a special way of reaching lost souls?
- 5) Evangelism and discipleship go hand in hand in the life of the church?

After the field results were tabulated, codified and analyzed, the data along with formal and informal observations, and learning from the in-depth engagement of the literature was then used to re-determine and to further develop the Bible Study, sermons and workshops. This was done with a good portion of the data being given to the context associate for ratification. The context associates help confirm that the themes discovered were accurate and they also pointed areas of weakness.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

This Doctor of Ministry project was birthed from the intersection and synergy of the writer and his context. The basis of this coming together was to address the pressing issues of young adult and youth members of the congregation missing the essence of the gospel and not being obedient to the will of God, the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, yet felt they were saved all because they had a good time in worship.

Emerging from this union was a well defined problem; young adults and youth were being entertained and not transformed as a result of worship. To alleviate this dilemma, and bring a sense of restoration and spiritual maturation to bear on this particular age group, the writer sought to create a ministry model that would address their issues moving them from being spectators to a gospel event to becoming soul winners and evangelist for the Lord.

The hypothesis or presupposition that gave spiritual direction to this project was that if young adults and youth are exposed to ongoing prophetic preaching that is relevant in addressing systemic issues they face on a regular basis, and if they are equipped with appropriate ways and tools to share the gospel message with their peers, an increase in overall church growth will be the result. To test this presupposition or hypothesis, the writer used a sermon on evangelism and discipleship, an expository Bible study and a church-wide workshop on evangelism and discipleship. Data triangulation was used to

analyze the data gathered from the various participants in order to draw reasonable conclusions.

### **Sermon: I've Got To Tell It**

#### **John 4**

The writer introduced the process of obtaining data for this Doctor of Ministry project at a church conference held a month prior to the beginning of the field experience. The members were excited about being participants in their pastor's continuing educational endeavors. He shared the importance of their participation, the added value the Doctor of Ministry degree would have on his ministry and the life of their church and how immediate results would be seen as a result of the research he had uncovered.

On the day the sermon was to be preached, the members gathered earlier than usual in the sanctuary as the ushers and context associated passed out bulletins and a questionnaire that was to be filled out by each member and returned at the end of service. There were more members than usual as the congregation made a concerted effort to support their pastor and *do a good job*. The normal excitement was slightly diminished as the congregants were concentrating on the worship in order to respond appropriately to the questions.

The sermon used for this project was based on John 4:29 and the story of the woman at the well. The exegetical particularities of this familiar passage of scripture deal with multiple opportunities. Showing hospitality to strangers and those who are stereotypically and sociologically incongruent provides the basis for Jesus and the woman to make good use of pedagogical teaching methods. Jesus teaches the woman about showing hospitality to strangers and she in turn teaches the people of her village about treating people as you would have them treat you. Secondly, this passage teaches

how to push past social stigmas and racial boundaries to be available to be used by God in whatever God requires. Finally, this text deals with what happens when people are excited about sharing the joy of meeting and being served by the Lord.

At the end of the worship, the congregants spent a moment providing answers to the questions and quietly passed then to an usher standing at the rear of the sanctuary. The results of the questionnaire is as follows:

- 1) Do you have a strong understanding about witnessing?

Of the persons responding, 90% said yes and 10% said no. While it was noted that an overwhelming number of persons in the congregation said they had a strong understand of witnessing. The results of their actions would indicate a disconnect between knowledge and experience. This became a very important finding for the writer; words and word knowledge are an important part of the African American culture when it comes to the church. Many in the church pride themselves on their knowledge of biblical truths but struggle with putting what they say they know into action in doing what the Bible says do.

- 2) Do you have a biblical definition of witnessing?

While 90 percent of the congregation have a strong understanding of witnessing; only 75% of those responding are able to give a biblical definition of witnessing and 25% cannot. Again, there is a clear disconnect between what one knows and what one is able to respond to. In many circles, if a person is unable to define a word, they really are not aware of what the word means. If this be true, then the number of persons in question one who say they understand witnessing really may not understand but only be familiar with

the word. On the other hand 75% is a significant number of persons who are not only aware of what witnessing is but can also define it biblically.

3) Do you honestly witness?

This question was posed to determine the number of members who actively engage in the command of God to make disciples and witness to the goodness of God. Based on the first two questions, a trend is emerging that suggest that fewer people put the word of God in action while a greater number of persons have an association of what the word says. When asked if members honestly witness, only 65% said they did 35% said they did not. The results of this question suggest that knowledge, and awareness does not translate into action; especially with respect to taking action on the word of God.

4) Are there distractions that deter you from witnessing?

The results of this question should give the writer or any pastor for that matter reason for pause. Only 41% of the people believe there are distractions to witnessing while 59% say that there are none. Again, 90% say they understand evangelism but only 59% of those who understand have no distractions that take them away from the act of evangelism.

5) Do you have a willingness or unwillingness to evangelize?

The problem that is present in the life of the writer's congregation is clearly revealed by the result of this final question. Over 93% of the participants say they have a willingness to witness and 7% say they are unwilling. At the end of the day, based on the number of new members that come to faith in Jesus Christ on an ongoing basis, churches are hemorrhaging and in many cases dying because there is an overwhelming number of persons who know about witnessing and have no impediment in doing so, however, they

just do not do it. Unless the congregation get involved in the process of evangelism and witnessing to persons who do not have a relationship with Jesus, it is going to be difficult to attract any new members, let along young adults and young people.

### **Bible Study – John 4**

The Bible study was conducted as a continuation of the sermon that was preached using the same biblical text. Since those who attended worship were also participants in Bible study, sharing and participation was greatly increased.

Using the John 4 text, the participants were instructed to first share this particular story in their own words using situations in their own lives to represent hospitality, being a servant and sharing the Good News of Jesus. Once all participants were done sharing their personal hermeneutical rendition of the story, we identified what each of their individual stories has in common. From this analysis, we were able to make an assessment about the difficulties of witnessing to strangers and those persons who are unfamiliar to us.

From the questionnaire provided, the questions were reworded to allow the participants to give open-ended statements. Making the adjustment in the questions gave a depth of understanding of the participants and allowed the writer to gain greater clarity into the mindset of the congregation.

1) What is your understanding of evangelism in the life of the church?

- Evangelism is important to getting new members
- Evangelism is like testifying about Jesus
- Evangelism helps the church grow

- Without evangelism people won't know about Jesus
- Jesus taught the disciples to evangelize

2) What does it mean to evangelize or witness?

- To bring people to faith in Jesus Christ
- I'm not sure
- I witness every day by talking about Jesus
- I can tell people about what Jesus means to me
- Jesus saved me and I want to tell it to everybody
- It is the command of Jesus to tell the world about him
- Evangelism is sharing the Good News.

3) Do you evangelize or witness?

- I evangelize when I tell people about Jesus
- I don't know enough about the Bible to evangelize
- I get afraid to talk about Jesus in public
- All the time, it is important to my life
- I talk about Jesus all the time and everywhere I go
- Every day

4) What makes it hard to witness or evangelize?

- I can do it one on one but not in a crowd
- I get afraid I will get asked a question I can't answer
- People think I am holy and stuff
- I don't like being called a holy roller

- My friends think I think I am better than them
- When I am talking to people of other religions
- Nervous around crowds

It was interesting that the participants found it easier to witness to people they do not know and easier still to strangers. There is a stigma about evangelism among God's people that is very interesting; evangelism is for people who think they are better than others. The writer was amazed that the very people who attend church on a regular basis had significant difficulty talking about the Bible or Jesus in public places or in places other than religious settings. One participant said that people would rather hear about crime and sex before they are willing to talk about God in public.

Has God become so private that good church people are unwilling to share the Good News publically or is it that more people are living double lives? The writer is very interested in this question and what effect it has on the decline of the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Evangelism Workshop**

The evangelism workshop began as an old fashioned country breakfast. Members gathered early to prepare the space for both food and fellowship. While the breakfast was going on, introductions were made and the occasion for our gathering was also identified. At this point, the members who participated in the sermon and Bible study portion of the field work were acquainted with the process and seemed ready to get busy.

The evangelism workshop was facilitated by two congregational development experts and was received very warmly by the participants. The workshop was to show how evangelism is really a part of the discipleship process and critical to the Great

Commission of Jesus. Often, people separate disciple and evangelism into two distinct functions; when this is done, it dilutes the effectiveness of the process of the Great Commission. When people come to a realization that it is impossible to do evangelism without discipleship and vice versa, it creates a new awareness regarding the importance of congregational sustainability and vitality. The results of the evangelism workshop is as follows:

- 1) Did you know that the Great Commission is about Discipleship and not evangelism?

This particular question allowed the participant to test their knowledge of scripture as well as the application of evangelism being a part of discipleship. Of those participating in the process 52% percent said yes and 48% said no. The closeness of the responses shows that work must be done in getting people to understand the importance of knowing how to use biblical precepts to grow the church.

- 2) Do you know the difference between evangelism and discipleship?

While the Great Commission is about a system of discipleship where discipleship and evangelism are one, within the context of the Great Commission discipleship and evangelism have different meanings but are essential to the whole. The discipleship portion of the Great Commission represents *being taught* while the evangelism portion represents *sharing the story* of the Good News of Jesus Christ. According to the results of this question, 70 % of the participants were aware of the difference between evangelism and discipleship while 30 % were not. If we can recall, this result is similar to those who were able to give a biblical definition of witnessing from the sermon questionnaire.

3) Is evangelism something that only pastors and leaders do?

This question was given to stimulate discussion and learning regarding the responsibility of the priesthood of all believers. This means that if you are a baptized believer in Jesus Christ, then you are responsible for evangelism and discipleship in the life of the church. It is important that the entire congregation is aware of the importance of the body fully participating in the growth of the church based on the Great Commission. The results of this question indicated that only 10% of those responding believe the responsibility for evangelism rest on the pastor and leadership of the church while 90% did not.

4) Young Adults have a special way of reaching lost souls?

This question was posed to assess if the congregation was aware that evangelism is not a *cookie cutter* process but one that is tailored to specific age and demographic groups. The responses to this question indicate a strong awareness of the diversity of methods for reaching young adults. Those responding to the question indicated that 85% were aware that young adults have a special way of reaching lost souls while only 15% were not. This is an encouraging statistic when earlier the data indicated that those responding did not know that the Great Commission was about discipleship and not evangelism. While members are not aware of the details of the biblical text, they are aware of the nature of relativity when it comes to growing the church.

5) Evangelism and discipleship go hand in hand in the life of the church.

This question was designed to determine if the congregation was aware of the relationship between evangelism and discipleship. According to the data, 100% of those responding said yes. Since this was the final question and since the workshop on

evangelism was the final component of the field work, it stands to reason that all of the participants became educated on the knowledge and application of discipleship and evangelism in the life of the local church.

Overall, the data results revealed that growth took place in the life of the participants with respect to discipleship and evangelism. The data also indicated that additional teaching on biblical precepts and application must be done in order to avoid members getting acquainted with *the way we've always done it* and strive to contextualize biblical concepts and precepts from a hermeneutical perspective.

Because the congregation is fully aware that discipleship and evangelism goes hand in hand and since they are strong in agreement that young adults and youth require different modalities of reaching persons in their peer groups, the task of compelling them to become disciples of Jesus Christ is not an unreasonable assignment. This would mean that patience, acceptance and understanding must take place in the minds and attitudes of the older generations as to not discourage them from doing what only they can do; evangelize and witness to the needs of persons in their own age group enabling them to return to the church with swiftness.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Reflections**

Getting young adults and youth to return to the church is a dilemma that churches have across the landscape of Christendom. This dilemma has grown to epidemic proportions in many congregations as every year more than 4000 churches close their doors compared to just over 1000 new church starts. There were about 4,500 new churches started between 1990 and 2000, with a twenty-year average of nearly 1000 a year. Every year, 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity. This translates into the realization that people are leaving the church. From our research, we have found that they are leaving as hurting and wounded victims-of some kind of abuse, disillusionment, or just plain neglect! From 1990 to 2000, the combined membership of all Protestant denominations in the USA declined by almost 5 million members (9.5 percent), while the US population increased by 24 million (11 percent). At the turn of the last century (1900), there was a ratio of 27 churches per 10,000 people, as compared to the close of this century (2000) where we have 11 churches per 10,000 people in America.<sup>1</sup>

In order to provide a remedy for this downward spiral in all communities in general and the African American community specifically, the writer endeavored to

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<sup>1</sup>Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline, <http://www.intotheword.org/articlesview.asp?articleid=3> (accessed November 2011).

provide a model of evangelistic empowerment targeted at young adults and youth. The writer, while being aware of the changing culture and climate of the church, it still stands to reason for him that the traditional church has to either gain pliability or run the risk of being extinct.

Reflecting on his upbringing and his launch into public ministry, the writer is extremely grateful for how God is using him and his gifts to bring about a positive and systemic change in the life of his congregation and community. Entering the United Theological Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program has been an experience the writer will long remember. Coming into contact with some of the most gifted and prolific preachers and pastors in the country has been nothing more than extraordinary. Being able to fellowship, make lifelong friendships and break bread while growing in spiritual and ministry maturity has been a significant blessing for the writer.

The challenges of mastering the process of self-directed learning and how to be self-motivated toward a preferred end has been very difficult; in fact, this has been possibly one of the most demanding and challenging responsibilities the writer has faced. Realizing that learning and teaching is a process of self-discovery, the writer savors the moments when he was required to press against the walls of his own heart's desire in order to bring this process to a close.

Balancing the demands of the church, being a new father and husband are enough within itself, but adding the stressors of an academic program that presupposes the student will be self-motivated toward establishing a timeline and timetable for getting work done was *the straw that broke the camel's back* on many days. Wanting to give up, wanting to give in, wanting to defer this process for another season continued to loom

large and heavy upon the writer as he pressed his way toward the finish of this process.

On some days he felt like Job, and on others he felt he could walk on water as he brought one intensive to a close after another. Looking back on the very first writing seminar that was offered to entry level students, the writer now knows what the facilitator was saying as the words cooperate and graduate ring a familiar tune, now that the final pages are being written.

Working with highly seasoned veterans of the church who are well respected and revered made the process of obtaining this degree even greater. The level of spiritual maturity and experience garnered from peer sessions, intensives and one-on-one conversations have proven to be invaluable. Sharing cutting edge ministry practices, participating in ongoing problem solving and exchanging ideas and possibilities for ministry with newly formed colleagues and lifelong friends will never be undervalued.

As a young pastor, the writer really appreciates looking back at the enumerable times that God's grace and mercy protected him for this moment in salvation history. The phrase, *The race is not given to the swift or the strong but to the one who endure until the end* has special significance for the writer as many times he wanted to throw in the towel and call it quits. He thanks God for pressing his way.

Ultimately, the process of becoming a doctor of the church has been a humbling and most gratifying experience, one the writer will cherish forever.

### **Summary**

This process was made significantly easier because of the pedagogical approach and systematic methodology that was used in each phase. In most programs of this magnitude, persons feel overwhelmed, thinking that they must consume the entire

understanding in one sitting. Not so in this process, each phase built on the next and with each phase, work could be completed for the corresponding chapter of the final document. With that being said, it was not until the third phase that the piece of the process began coming together into a tapestry of untold beauty. At Phase Three, the writer discovered that this process was not about the church but about him. He discovered that in order to make systemic change for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ at the local church level that God would use their experiential encounters already lived and overcome to transform the conditions of where he was called to serve.

The writer began to realize that like Saul, God would use the vestiges of the writer's past lifestyle to become a champion soul-winner for Christ. Who else could God use to negotiate the unstable terrain of young adults and today's youth but one who had been there, done that and is still able to relate.

Recognizing the difficulties of the church's relationship with the former pastor, the writer marveled at how God has allowed him to gain the trust of the people in a relatively short period of time in order that the growth of the church and life saving message of Jesus Christ be shared with a multigenerational people. The church is indeed growing and prospering under the leadership of the writer in significant ways. Needless to say, the attraction to older women in his teenage days has provided the writer mannerisms of one with an old soul. It has been this old soul that has allowed a very young and progressive minded pastoral leader to gain the affection of young and old alike and is allowing him to use prophetic preaching to transform young people from worshippers to witnesses in the heart of the hood.

## Conclusion

The writer's final thoughts are few; he believes that trusting a process of self-directed learning has worked to transform his life and ministry for years to come. While there is significant work to be done in totally transforming the ethos of the congregation, the breakthrough in evangelism and evangelistic acceptance on the part of the congregation will lead the way toward a bright and vital future for the writer and congregation.

Very little can be said about do-over issues; however, the writer does not recommend taking on the task of being on the preaching circuit while trying to make intrinsic changes in the life of the church. He believes that his personality, coupled with his faith journey speaks volumes to the success he and his congregation are experiencing. Any congregation in the country can replicate the model in its simplest form. The essence of the model is this, allow those who can reach the lost to reach the lost, and when they are brought to the church, the body must receive them and love them until they are rooted, discipled and prepared for a life of evangelism in the community.

Discipleship and evangelism are not events to be participants in; rather, they are a way of life prescribed by Jesus in the Great Commission in order that all might be saved. Too many congregations make the mistake of engaging in programs, events, and activities when they should be concentrating on transformational ministry that builds up the body of Christ through effective discipleship and evangelism opportunities.

**APPENDIX A**  
**SERMON NOTES AND QUESTIONNAIRE**

**I've got to tell it!  
John 4:29 (NKJV)**

I am very familiar with the movie *The Color Purple* and know the characters by name. I have laughed and gotten watery-eyed on certain parts in the past, but because I've watched this movie so frequently that now it doesn't have the same effect on me.

Don't get me wrong, many of us have those famous lines within the movie that we all love and they are probably in your mind as I am talking to you. Such lines like when Celie and Nettie as children would stand in the yard and play a hand game while reciting "Me and You us never part-MAKI-DA-DA. Me and You us never part-MAKI-DA-DA. Ain't no ocean, ain't no sea-MAKI-DA-DA. Keep my sister 'way from me". Another line comes to mind when Celie tells Harpo to beat Sophia, and after Harpo and Sophia fight; Sophia stomps through the corn field, finds Celie and says "You told Harpo to beat me?" I've had to fight all my life and I will kill him dead; I tell yah!

Another very hilarious scene is when Shug Avery is very intoxicated, looks at Celie and says: "You show is ugly." But for me the most powerful scene is when Celie is about to leave Mister and looks at him with two fingers "fork-shaped" and aimed his direction and says "Until you do right by me, the same things done to me is done to you." Harpo is scared and befuddled all at the same time because he never thought Celie would be liberated from under his power.<sup>1</sup>

While watching this movie previously and through spiritual eyes I begin to see how from a theological perspective the movie relates to you and me. As I watched the

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<sup>1</sup>The quotes referenced in the above narrative are from my memory of Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, Inc. 1982).

movie the scenes became more profound. Shug Avery as a young lady comes into the church where her father the pastor is sweeping the sanctuary, but because of his disdain of her lifestyle she is ignored as though she does not exist. By the time you come towards the conclusion of the movie the church choir is singing as Shug listens from across the lake. She is now in competition with the church choir who out sings she and her band. When conviction hits her soul she begins to walk the trail that leads to the church as her band plays, she now out-sings the choir in the church. Shug Avery sings all the way into the church, hugs her father and whispers in his ear; "See daddy sinners have souls too."

I submit and surmise that no matter how bad you are or have messed up when you encounter Jesus; He will change your tragedy to a testimony, He will change your mistakes into a miracle, and He will change your setbacks to a setup.

### **1<sup>ST</sup>: YOU MUST REALIZE YOUR PAST CONDITION**

VS: 16-18 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

### **2<sup>ND</sup>: YOU MUST RECOGNIZE YOUR NEED FOR A PERSONAL CONNECTION**

VS: 25-26 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am *He*."

**3<sup>RD</sup>: YOU MUST RESOLVE TO PROCLAIM YOUR CONVICTIONS**

VS: 28-29a The woman then left her water pot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”

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*Please answer truthfully by circling one*

a. Do you have a strong understanding of witnessing (evangelism)?

Yes      No

b. Do you have a biblical definition of witnessing (evangelism)?

Yes      No

c. Do you honestly witness (evangelism)?

Yes      No

d. Are there distractions that deter you from witnessing (evangelizing)?

Yes      No

e. Do you have a willingness or unwillingness to witness (evangelize)?

Yes      No

**APPENDIX B**

**BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE**

**United Theological Seminary  
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Jamison Hunter  
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**Bible Study Questionnaire**

- 1) Do you have a strong understanding about witnessing?
- 2) Do you have a biblical definition of witnessing?
- 3) Do you honestly witness?
- 4) Are there distractions that deter you from witnessing?
- 5) Do you have a willingness or unwillingness to evangelize?

**APPENDIX C**  
**EVANGELISM WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE**

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Jamison Hunter  
McKissick/Carter Group: Prophetic Preaching**

**Evangelism Workshop Questionnaire**

- 1) Did you know that the Great Commission is about discipleship and not evangelism?
  
  
  
  
- 2) Do you know the difference between evangelism and discipleship?
  
  
  
  
- 3) Is evangelism something that only pastors and leaders do?
  
  
  
  
- 4) Young Adults have a special way of reaching lost souls?
  
  
  
  
- 5) Evangelism and discipleship go hand in hand in the life of the church?

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